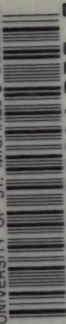


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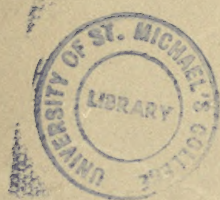




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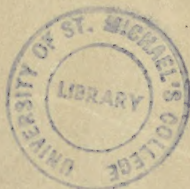








# THE CURÉ OF ARS

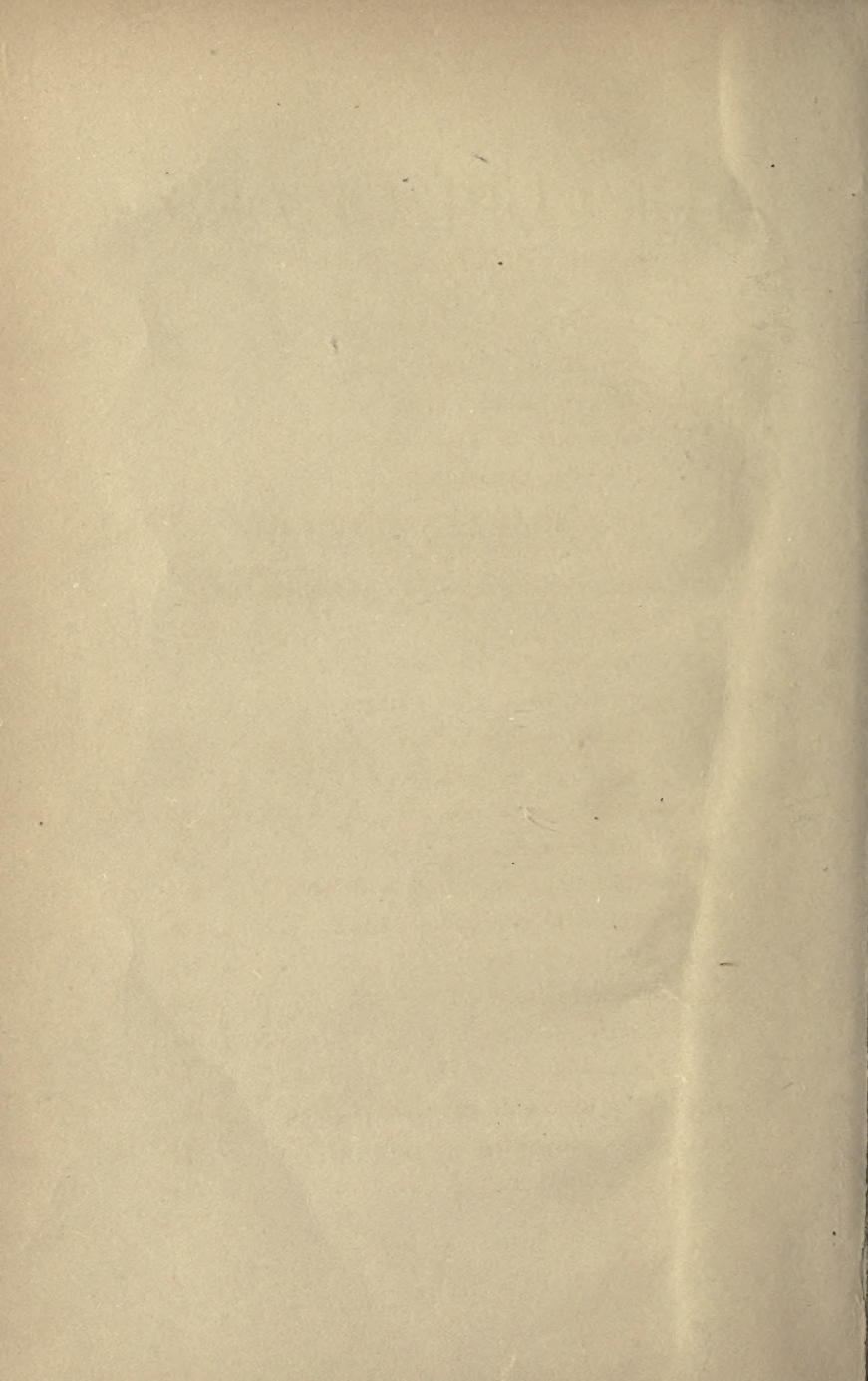


By KATHLEEN O'MEARA ✓

Author of "*Life of Frederic Ozanam*," "*Queen by Right Divine*," "*Iza's Story*," etc.

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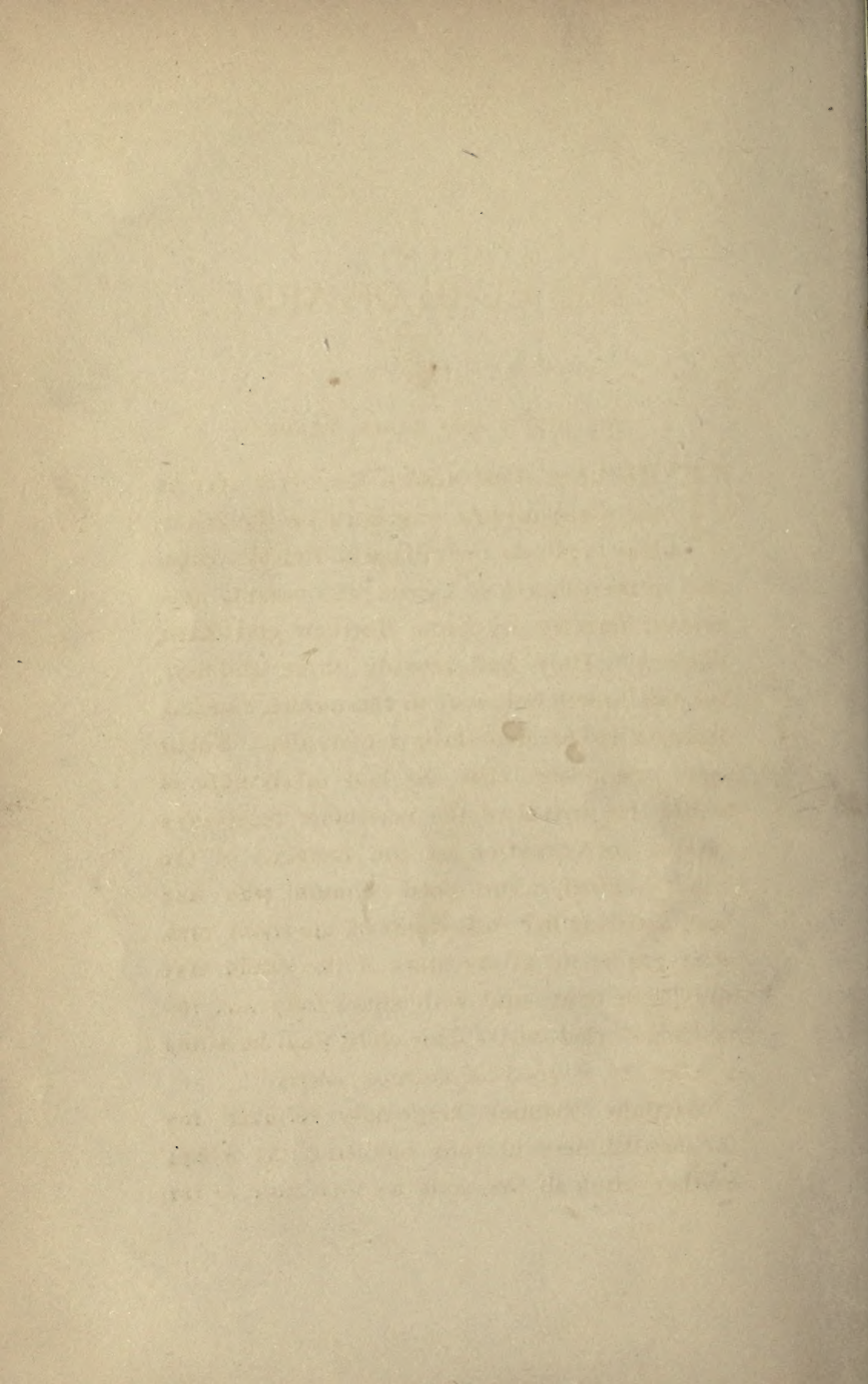




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# THE CURÉ OF ARS

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## I!

### HIS BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS.

THE holy priest known the world over as the Curé of Ars, was born on the 8th of May, 1786, in the village of Dardilly, situated in the suburbs of Lyons. His parents were peasant farmers, by name Matthew and Marie Vianney. They had already three children; but this fourth one was, so the mother fancied, destined to be something remarkable. Vague signs and tokens that she had taken note of before the arrival of the newcomer received a curious corroboration at the moment of the infant's birth. The good woman who had been assisting her rushed out of the room, and, after gazing up at the stars of the "mild May sky," ran back, and with equal folly and imprudence cried out: "This child shall be either a saint or a good-for-nothing scamp!"

Matthew Vianney laughingly rebuked her for her silliness in thus agitating the young mother; but all the same he took note of the

horoscope, and so did his wife. Many a time when she was nursing Jean-Marie the mother exclaimed: "My little man is not going to be a scamp: he is going to be a saint!" In order to work out the fulfilment of her prophecy, she began at once to instill the love of holiness and the horror of sin into the child's mind. The thing he remembered longest in after life was the expression of his mother's face, as she bent over him, saying earnestly, "My little Jean-Marie, if I were to see thee offend God it would grieve me more than anything else on earth." These lessons were not lost. At three years old Jean-Marie would steal into a corner where he thought nobody saw him, and say his prayers, repeating out loud over and over again those that he had to learn by heart. One day he disappeared unperceived, and his mother, after seeking anxiously for a long time, discovered him on his knees in a corner of the cowhouse, his small hands joined devoutly, praying aloud with all his heart. She checked the cry of surprise and joy that rose to her lips, and gently chid the little hermit for having made her uneasy by hiding so long. But though he had a saint's instinctive love for solitary communing with God, Jean-Marie would, with the simplicity



of the little child, pop down on his knees when the Angelus bell rang, no matter where he was or how many people were present. .

His love for the Blessed Virgin was so tender and personal that those who witnessed it foresaw extraordinary favors for his soul. When he was four years old his mother gave him a little wooden statue of the Madonna, and he took it to his heart like a living friend, fondling it and taking great care of it, and going to it for comfort in all his childish troubles. If he hurt himself, or if any small grief befell him, his brothers and sisters had only to give him the little Madonna and his tears ceased at once. His love for Our Lady had come to him as naturally as his love for his mother. In after years a priest said to him one day: "You have a great love for the Blessed Virgin?" He replied: "I have loved her ever since I can remember." And to the end of his life he recalled the pang it cost him when his mother told him to give his Rosary to an elder sister who coveted it. "I obeyed," he said; "but what bitter tears I shed in parting with my little beads!"

But nowhere was his piety so remarkable as when assisting at the Holy Sacrifice. The

pious villagers who saw the tiny creature so absorbed in devotion during Mass used to remark to his parents: "You must make the little lad a priest; see how he says his prayers!"

Matthew Vianney owned five cows, an ass, and three sheep. Every member of the family shared the labor of the farm; the eldest son had charge of the cattle, and when Jean-Marie reached the age of seven he was entrusted with the care of the three sheep. There was, not far from the farmhouse, a green valley full of shady trees where the blackbirds sang; a noisy stream went babbling through it between banks covered with wild flowers. The place was called Chante-Merle, and was a favorite resort with several juvenile shepherds, who used to take their little flocks there to graze. Jean-Marie joined them, and was to be seen trotting off every morning with his staff in one hand and his precious statue, from which he never parted, in the other. He was a merry little man, full of innocent fun, and always ready to join any game that was going, so the others were all fond of him; but his greatest pleasure was to converse with Our Lady. He spied out a pretty green mound, which struck him as a suitable throne for his Madonna; and



having placed her there, he asked his companions to kneel down with him and say the "Hail Mary." They consented; and when the prayer was finished Jean-Marie stood up and began to tell them how good and sweet Our Lady was, and how they ought to love her. Some of those present remembered in after years how startled and impressed they were by the extempore exhortation of the little preacher.

He, however, was not satisfied with saying a "Hail Mary," and then leaving his Madonna: he would see his flock safe in some grassy pasture, and then return to her and remain in prayer for hours. He had found out a hollow in an old tree which served as a niche, and here he placed his statue. His companions would watch him from a distance as he knelt rapt in prayer, his hands sometimes joined together, sometimes crossed upon his breast, but his attitude always suggesting recollection and modesty.

There was, altogether, something about Jean-Marie which set him apart from other children, and they themselves felt this without understanding it. A little shepherdess of seven, named Marian Vincent, was walking home with

him one evening, and after some confidential talk Jean-Marie said: "I think we two should agree very well together."—"Yes, I think we should," replied Marian; "if our parents will consent, we had better get married."—"Oh, no!" exclaimed Jean-Marie, with ungallant sincerity; "don't you ever count on me for that! I never mean to do that!" When Marian was an old woman, spinning at her cottage door, she used to relate with emotion this idyllic reminiscence of her childhood, and give it as her opinion that even at this tender age Jean-Marie's heart was unconsciously vowed away to the Divine Spouse.

Love of the poor was the only rival love that divided his young heart with Jesus and His Blessed Mother. The child was, it is true, in a school where he could scarcely fail to learn to love the poor. Matthew Vianney's house was open to them like a wayside fountain. It was a common thing for as many as twenty poor people to turn in there of a night for food and shelter. In the summer time Matthew housed them in the barn; but on winter nights he would light a great fire of fagots in the kitchen, set a big pot of potatoes on it, and when they were boiled serve them, and divide the meal



between his children and the poor. When the last potato had disappeared he said night prayers aloud, and then conducted his guests to the hayloft, taking care that they were secure from the cold and wind, and as comfortable as his scant accommodation could make them.

The Christian laborer entertained many an angel unawares, no doubt, amongst these strangers. One cold winter's night there knocked at his door a pilgrim who was destined one day to shine in the calendar of the Church. The traveller who tarries on his way through Dardilly is sure to hear, as of a great glory that lives in the tradition of the village, how, on his way to a neighboring shrine, Benedict Joseph Labre slept one night under the roof of Matthew Vianney.

There were often little children amongst these wayfaring guests, and Jean-Marie from his earliest years learned to devote himself to them as his own peculiar charge. He would squeeze them into a place near the fire, and save his supper that they might eat more abundantly; he would sometimes examine their clothes, and if they were ragged or torn he would go and coax his mother for some

of his own to replace them. The love of souls, which was one day to burn in him like a living flame, was visible too in his readiness to teach them the Lord's Prayer and the "Hail Mary." If the elders caught him in the act of exercising this sweet apostolate, and expressed their admiration, the child would blush and slink away quite ashamed.

While the Revolution was raging over France, terrorizing the people and persecuting the Church, Jean-Marie was quietly learning the duties and becoming enamored of the beauty of religion in the school of this delightful home life. It was a time when every courageous Christian might be called upon to exercise a kind of priesthood. Old men took the office upon themselves, and, in the absence of the priest, gathered the people round them to say the Rosary or follow the liturgy of the Mass and Vespers. Devout women, who had been driven from their convents, taught the catechism to children, and prepared them for the Sacraments, which some brave priest contrived, at peril of his life, to come now and then to administer. Sister Deville and Sister Combet, two religious of the Institute of St. Charles, had the happiness of preparing Jean-Marie



for his First Communion, which he made in a barn, where, on the stealthy arrival of a priest, an altar was hurriedly prepared and Mass celebrated.

The boy grew visibly in virtue after this great event. He was now large enough to take his share of field labor. He found the digging hard, for he was a frail lad, and lacked "that vigor which slumbers in the peasant's arm." But he supplemented his physical strength by constant prayer; those who watched him in the field declared that he was always praying; even when his lips did not move, his countenance betrayed the devout recollection of one who was absorbed in the presence of God. These were happy days, to which Jean-Marie always looked back with regret. Many a time in after years, when oppressed with the accumulated burdens of his extraordinary ministry, he was heard to murmur as he heaved a sigh, "Oh, how happy I was when I had only to look after my sheep and dig away with my spade!" His great amusement of an evening, when he had done his lesson, was to make an altar and surround it with little figures of priests and nuns. They were very prettily done, and his companions often coveted them

and would offer him their toys in exchange; but the only bribe that ever induced him to part with them was to offer to do his field-work, and so leave him free to go and hear Mass in some neighboring place where a priest was expected on a given day. For this he was always ready to sacrifice his figures and miniature candlesticks.

After the great battle of Marengo the storm of the Revolution fell; peace followed, and the doors of the churches were opened. The village of Écully, a few miles from Dardilly, was one of the first to receive back its parish priest, and the Vianneys, who had relations in the village, attended Mass there regularly the moment the worship of God was restored. M. Balley, the priest, was a zealous and intelligent man, and quickly singled out Jean-Marie as an object of predilection. The attraction was mutual; and the boy, who had from his earliest days longed to be a priest, soon confided the secret of his vocation to M. Balley, who promised to do all in his power to further it. Matthew Vianney and his wife were overjoyed at the prospect of having their son in Holy Orders, and consented to make every sacrifice in their power to secure this honor to the family.

Jean-Marie was sent to live at Ecully with a relative of his mother's, so that he might receive lessons from M. Balley; and so great already was the boy's reputation for piety that a number of persons who knew him only by report came forward and offered to contribute to his maintenance. A pious widow of the village asked leave to wash for him, and declared that she was thankful to have the pretext for going to see him at regular intervals, because of the edification she always received from conversation with him.

He was not a clever boy. He had extraordinary trouble in committing anything to memory, and having overcome the first difficulties in reading and writing, it seemed as if he could get no further. He was dull of understanding, and, in spite of M. Balley's skill and patience, his progress was so slow that at times the poor child was ready to despair of ever learning enough to pass for the priesthood. When he felt thus faint-hearted he would ask leave to go to Dardilly to see his parents; but M. Balley, who saw the beauty of the boy's soul and believed in the solidity of his vocation, never granted the permission. "Why do you want to go home, my child?" he would say.



"Your parents, seeing you so hopeless, will conclude that their sacrifices are being thrown away, that it is time lost leaving you here to study, and they will call you home. You must not expose your vocation to that danger." Spurred on by these words, Jean-Marie would take heart of grace, and, redoubling the fervor of his prayers, set to work afresh.

But neither prayer nor perseverance seemed able to overcome his natural deficiencies; he continued hopelessly dull. At last, finding all his own efforts unavailing, he resolved to give them up, and have recourse to purely supernatural agencies. With the approval of his director, he made a vow to go on a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Francis Regis, the apostle of Vivarais, and there implore help to acquire learning enough to pass his examinations for the priesthood. He set out on foot, and begged his way to Louvesc. God accepted his desire for humiliation by allowing him to be treated with great contumely all along the road. He had not the appearance or manner of a real beggar, and when he asked for alms or shelter he was abused as an idle vagabond, and turned rudely away. Thus did he accomplish his journey to the tomb of the saint in true mediæval

pilgrim fashion. St. Francis, however, was not deaf to his petition, and from this time forth his dullness disappeared; his intelligence was quickened in a way that astonished his master, and he found no further difficulty in getting through the tasks that were set him.

## II.

## HIS MILITARY SERVICE—FLIGHT.

At the end of five years of arduous work and steady progress in every virtue, Jean-Marie's vocation seemed so solid and developed that M. Balley went to Lyons and had him entered as an aspirant to the priesthood, a step which exempted the youth from military service. Owing to some unexplained circumstance, however, his name was not inscribed on the registers. Three years went by without any claim being made on him; but just as he was going up to his examinations in philosophy, it being found that he did not figure on any list, the authorities, without further inquiries, sent him his recruiting papers one morning, with orders to start for Bayonne.

War was over; the army and the country were resting on the laurels that had cost such an amount of human slaughter; therefore the recruiting papers fell on Jean-Marie and his family like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. Matthew Vianney rose, however, to meet the trouble with equal courage and generosity.



He determined to buy a substitute for his son. They found one, and Jean-Marie was set free at the enormous cost of three thousand francs. But just as the family were beginning to rejoice over the rescue so dearly bought, the substitute walked back with the money, and said he could not make up his mind to go a-soldiering.

The shock of this disappointment, coming after the happiness of the escape, so affected Jean-Marie that he fell seriously ill. The military authorities ordered him to be carried, suffering as he was, to the hospital at Lyons, where he remained fifteen days, edifying everybody by his patience and piety. On the 13th of November he was considered strong enough to bear the fatigue of the journey, and was sent off in a cart for the rest of the way. But the bumping of the cart, on which he lay half frozen, brought on a fresh attack of fever, and they were compelled to drop him on the way, at Roanne. Here he lay six weeks in bed in the hospital. During that time he won the hearts of the Sisters and the doctors by his piety, gentleness and patient courage. They nursed him with the tenderest kindness, and left nothing undone to hasten his recovery, although it was to be the signal for his departure. And

no sooner, indeed, was it possible for him to leave than an order came for him to join a detachment that was being formed at Roanne to proceed to Spain.

Jean-Marie bade a sorrowful farewell to his kind friends, and before going for his ticket went into a church to say his Rosary. In the fervor of his devotions the unlucky recruit forgot that time was flying, and when he presented himself at the office he was an hour too late. Captain Blanchard, the officer in command, poured out a volley of abuse on him, called him a sneak and a coward, and threatened to send him in chains to Bayonne as a deserter. Jean-Marie tried in vain to make himself heard above the storm of invectives; but two other officers who were present interfered, and made their angry superior listen to reason. "If the poor fellow had meant to desert," they urged, "he would not have come here for his ticket." This argument calmed Captain Blanchard, and he consented to sign the recruit's papers. He then bade him set out immediately after the corps, and march in double-quick time so as to overtake it.

Jean-Marie went forth with the determination to obey this order, and for the first mile or so

stepped out courageously. But he was still weak; his strength soon began to flag, and he felt very forlorn as he tramped along the lonely road. The life of a soldier appeared to him more and more odious and intolerable, and his soul yearned for the priesthood as it had never done before. There rose before him a picture of the lads of his own age whom he had seen dragged from their homes as he had been; some had never returned; others had come back with a chain round their neck, cursing their evil doom. These were deserters who had been caught and were being taken to be shot. It seemed to Jean-Marie, in his present mood, as if to be shot were an enviable doom compared to spending the best years of his youth in the companionship of brutal, ignorant and impious men, as these soldiers had always appeared to be; he contrasted this with the life of prayer and blessed service that was to have been his, and his heart felt like breaking at the thought of having lost it forever.

In his despair he turned to Mary, his unfailing help in trouble, and began his Rosary, praying aloud as he walked. Scarcely had he finished the first five decades when there appeared suddenly on the road a stranger, who



accosted him, and, almost in the words of Our Lord to the disciples on their way to Emmaus, asked him why he went thus sorrowful. Jean-Marie, glad of the companionship, related his story—how he had hoped to be a priest, and was now going instead to be a soldier. The stranger expressed great sympathy for him. Seeing how weak he was, he insisted on carrying his knapsack; and, drawing him on to speak freely of his home, his altered prospects, his lost vocation, he led him across the fields farther and farther from the main road. They had gone many miles before Jean-Marie noticed that they had left the highway. He was now footsore and quite spent with fatigue; but on they tramped, his friendly companion cheering him with kindly and pleasant conversation. Night closed in, and still on they went. At last, near ten o'clock, they stopped at a wayside cottage. Here the stranger knocked for admittance; the inmates had gone to bed, but they presently answered him through the closed door, and after a low and rapid parley, which was inaudible to Jean-Marie, his deliverer bade him good-night, walked quickly away, and vanished in the darkness. Jean-Marie never saw him again, and never heard who he was.

Meantime the door of the lonely cottage was unbarred, and the wayfarer was bidden to enter; and not only was food placed before him, but the hospitable inmates insisted on his lying down in their bed, while they went to finish their night's rest in the hayloft. Next morning they shared their frugal meal with him, then frankly told him they were too poor to continue hospitality toward him, but that they would take him to a place where he would be in perfect safety. Jean-Marie accepted the offer. He now felt as if his own destiny had been taken out of his hands, and that he must just let himself drift, trusting to Providence.

The village of Noës was situated at the entrance of the great forest of the Madeleine, on the borders of the provinces of Loire and Allier. His kindly host led the deserter thither, and, strange as it may seem, took him straight to the mayor of the commune, told him of the poor conscript's misadventure, and entreated him to protect him from the pursuit of the law. It was a comical request to make to the local magistrate; but the good man was touched with pity for the gentle, delicate-looking lad, and consented to join in the conspiracy. He assured Jean-Marie that he need fear nothing

at Noës, and at once went with him to an excellent woman, called Mère Fayot, a widow who was held in loving respect by all the village, and in whose house the deserter was sure to be safe. She received him, in truth, with most motherly kindness, and promised to look upon him as a son. The mayor told him he might now consider himself perfectly safe, even—which was altogether unlikely—supposing the police would dream of coming to look for him in this out-of-the-way village. But the kind magistrate was not in reality as certain of this as he feigned to be. The fact of Noës being so isolated in the midst of the mountains made it precisely a tempting retreat for a deserter, and the agents of the law were likely enough to suspect Jean-Marie of having taken refuge there. In order the better to conceal his identity, he took the name of Jerome, and showed himself abroad as little as possible.

Nothing could exceed Mère Fayot's kindness to him; she made no distinction between him and her own children, and the gratitude and affection with which she inspired young Vianney were boundless. He used to declare in his old age that he had known many saintly men and women in his life, but that he had



never met two more beautiful souls than Mère Fayot and M. Balley.

And after a little while the fugitive grew bolder and almost forgot the sword that was suspended over his head. He worked in every possible way in order to make himself useful to his kind hostess and her friends. He asked leave of the mayor to do duty as schoolmaster, and the offer was thankfully accepted. He fulfilled this office with such success as to win the hearts of the village children and the warm gratitude of their parents. The Fayot children soon came to look on him as a saint. They said of him that he always seemed to be praying; and the eldest son, who shared his bed, when he awoke in the night used to hear him murmuring prayers to himself. The pious schoolmaster, however, was full of activity and ready to put his hand to any work. When the fine weather returned the school grew empty; all hands were wanted in the fields, and "M. Jerome" took his place amongst the laborers, and worked as hard as any of them.

But all this time the eyes of the police were abroad, and periodical descents were made on Noës in pursuit of the runaway. Everybody there knew his secret now, and every-

body was on the watch to protect him. When it was known that a search was being made in the neighborhood, scouts were posted on a high point at either end of the village, and the approach of the police was announced by signals, so that the fugitive had time to get out of the way. One day he hid in a hayloft over a cowhouse, and the search lasted so long that he was nearly smothered under the hay. The weather was hot, and he was afraid to move; for the searchers were close by, and seemed spurred to unusual vigilance by fresh suspicion. He suffered so severely during this ordeal that he made a promise to God never to complain of anything for the rest of his life.

Jean-Marie's parents remained in grievous anxiety about him for some time, for he did not dare to let them know where he was. But he was so unhappy thinking of their distress that at last Mère Fayot agreed to go to Dardilly and tell them that he was safe. We can easily imagine the welcome she, with this good news, received from the Vianneys. Their child was safe, well and happy! Everybody loved him and was in league to protect him against the cruel police! But Matthew Vianney's paternal joy quickly gave way to

his strong sense of justice. Since the lad was in good health it was now his duty to go and join his corps, and relieve his family from the ceaseless worry to which they had been subjected ever since his desertion; for the military authorities, who were keeping a sharp lookout after him, were persuaded that his parents knew where he was, and were perpetually sending for them and putting them to considerable inconvenience and expense.

But good Mère Fayot did not agree with Matthew Vianney. "Your son shall not go a-soldiering," she replied; "and you shall not find out where he is. I will not tell you my name, or give you any clue to where I live; and if you find out, I will immediately send your son to seek shelter in another place much farther off, and every soul in the village will keep his secret." Perhaps, in his heart, the worthy man was not sorry to be so sturdily opposed and circumvented; at any rate, Mère Fayot went away without giving him any information as to her dwelling-place.

Not many months after her visit the recruitment of 1810 began. François Vianney, a younger son, drew a high number; but as everybody was now going to the frontier, and



he was sure to be soon called out with the reserve, his friends advised him to be beforehand in answering the appeal, and to enlist at once, and thus redeem the family honor and rid the house of police and spies. François consented, and marched at once for the frontier. Strange to say, it was the same recruiting officer, Captain Blanchard, who had threatened to send Jean-Marie in chains to Bayonne, that now used his kindly influence to have the deserter's name taken off the list of recruits and his bans raised.

When it was announced at Noës that "M. Jerome" was free the whole village rejoiced as for some personal good luck; but this joy quickly gave way to grief when they found that he was going to leave them. For no sooner did Jean-Marie hear of his pardon than he made ready to return to Écully in order to resume his studies for the priesthood. Everybody wanted to give him something as a remembrance; but, taking Mère Fayot's advice, the people ended by collecting enough money to provide him with a trousseau. The village tailor made him a *soutane*; the good wives gave their homespun linen, the young girls made it into necessary clothes for him,

and Mère Fayot presented him with her wedding towels, which had never been used. Thus equipped by the loving generosity of his humble friends, and followed by their prayers, Jean-Marie, who had come like a thief in the night-time to Noës, went forth full of joy and honor from his hiding-place, and returned to his parents after an absence of fourteen months.

## III.

HE ENTERS THE SEMINARY.—HIS ORDINATION. No one rejoiced more sincerely over his return than Abbé Balley. He knew better than any one what a beautiful soul was Jean-Marie's, and he foresaw what a valuable servant he would be in the Church. He was himself quite capable of carrying on the young aspirant's studies to their completion, but he thought it better that he should finish them at the Petit Séminaire of Verrières. Here Jean-Marie entered on his course of philosophy. His natural dullness, which had been so great at first as to prevent his acquiring the most elementary knowledge, though it had been greatly mitigated by the intervention of St. Francis, was still an obstacle to his advancement in the higher studies, and he seemed incapable of the intellectual effort necessary at this point for carrying him successfully through his philosophy. His masters grew impatient at his slowness of comprehension, his fellow-students made a butt of him, and he had a good deal to suffer. But he soon conquered

all ridicule and opposition by his angelic sweetness, his humility, his prompt obedience, and his piety. His companions came to admire him as a saint and emulate him as the model of seminarists.

As it often happens, however, there was one evil spirit amongst his fellow-students who could not bear the sight of Jean-Marie's superiority, and who was filled with bitter envy by the praise bestowed upon him. This young man left nothing undone to annoy this saintly youth, until, finding taunts and insults of no avail, he had recourse to blows and violence. Young Vianney replied by the most unruffled patience and charity, and at last fairly conquered his enemy by love, and turned his wicked jealousy into a warm friendship.

After going through his philosophy at Verrières, Jean-Marie returned to study theology with M. Balley. Both master and pupil brought their whole heart and will to the work; they prayed for the success with more fervent perseverance even than they studied, and when the time came for passing the examination M. Balley felt almost certain of a successful result. But God reserved one crowning humiliation for his servant. Jean-Marie was so



intimidated by the cold solemnity of the examiners, that he lost his presence of mind, forgot everything, blushed, stammered, and was turned away with a disheartening verdict—pronounced utterly unfit to pass.

M. Balley was grievously disappointed, but his confidence in God and in Jean-Marie's real merit rose above this crushing defeat. He went straight to the superior of the Great Seminary, and persuaded him to come next day, with one of the vicars-general, to the presbytery of Écully, and there put the rejected pupil through a second examination. This time the candidate came off better. The examiners were perfectly satisfied with his answers, recognized that he was thoroughly well grounded in his theology, and passed him on at once to the Great Seminary to prepare for ordination.

Here, as elsewhere, Jean-Marie quickly made himself beloved by all, and was regarded as a model of virtue. And yet when the time came for ordaining him the directors of the Seminary hesitated. His tender piety, his purity and mortification, his humility and obedience, excited their fullest admiration; but his learning was so limited, his aptitude

for every branch of study so poor, that they were afraid to confide to him the tremendous responsibility of the priesthood. They decided that before taking the momentous decision, they must consult the diocesan authorities. Cardinal Fesch was absent, so they begged his Vicar-General, Abbé Courbon, to act as judge.

When we consider what the subject of all this conscientious mistrust was one day to be in the Church,—when we recall the magnificent apostolate he was to fulfil, the glory he was to gain for God by his wonderful work among souls,—and then think that all these blessed results were for a moment *jéopardized*, hanging, as it were, by a hair held by Abbé Courbon, we tremble, and wait with bated breath as if the sentence were yet in suspense.

The Vicar-General heard the testimony of the learned and pious ecclesiastics who appealed to him, and then he put these questions to them:

“Is the young man devoted to the Mother of God? Does he say his beads?”

“He is a model of piety,” was the reply; “he is most tenderly devoted to the Mother of God and the Rosary is his favorite prayer.”

"Then I will receive him, and God's grace will do the rest."

It is only right to add that Abbé Courbon, whose discernment of souls and knowledge of men were remarkable, had already heard from many trustworthy sources about the singular piety of young Vianney. M. Balley, needless to say, had been to the fore, and the moment he heard that the fate of his beloved child was under discussion, had hurried from Ecully to testify in his behalf, and by the weight of his authority incline the scales in his favor. The future Curé of Ars was often heard to say: "M. Balley will have a deal to answer for before God for having gone bail for a poor dunce like me." M. Balley, however, felt no burden whatever upon him, and when the great day of ordination came there was only one face in the sanctuary that shone more brightly than his: that was the young priest's. Those who saw Jean-Marie Vianney on the altar-steps of the Cathedral of Grenoble, where he was ordained alone, never forgot the radiant expression of his countenance as he consecrated his life and heart to the service of God. He was in his thirtieth year, the date of his ordination being the 9th of August, 1815.

## IV.

## HIS FIRST MISSION.

No sooner was his dear pupil ordained than M. Balley hastened to the Archbishop, and asked to have him as his vicar at Ecully. It was a great joy for both when they came together again. The delight of Ecully was equally great. The people already looked upon their curé as a saint, and now they had a second saint. The presbytery was, in truth, a little paradise of virtue. The venerable pastor and his young disciple vied with each other in fasting and penance and every kind of austerity. M. Balley set an example of priestly perfection which his pupil strove not only to imitate but to surpass. It is not known for certain where the Abbé Vianney said his first Mass, but it was most probably at Ecully. It is certain that he began there his wonderful mission in the confessional, and that his first penitent was his master, M. Balley.

The young priest's marvellous gift for directing souls soon became known; his confessional was besieged late and early, and people began



to come from distant parishes to seek consolation and guidance from him. His love of the poor was equalled only by his love of poverty. He lived on almost nothing, and he wore his clothes until they fell to pieces and refused to be patched any more. In all this he was the worthy disciple of M. Balley, who brought himself to such a degree of weakness by fasting that his large, nobly-built body could hardly support itself, and became so emaciated that his flock sent a deputation to the Archbishop, imploring him to forbid their pastor to continue his merciless austerities.

These kindred souls were allowed to remain together only two years. The Abbé Balley, worn out with labors and sufferings, and ripe for heaven, sickened and died. He bequeathed his instruments of penance—a terrible array—to his spiritual son, begging him to hide them away, and never let any one hear of them; “because,” he said, “if people found them after my death they would fancy I had done something to expiate my sins, and they would leave me in purgatory to the end of the world.” Then, laying his hands upon Abbé Vianney’s head, he blessed him tenderly, saying, “Courage, my child! Continue to love and serve our good

Master. Remember me at the altar. Adieu! We shall meet yonder." After uttering this farewell he closed his eyes, and, says M. Vianney, "his beautiful soul took flight to the angels, and made Paradise more joyous."

## V.

## HE IS SENT TO ARS.

THE bereaved flock comforted themselves with the thought of having another saint in their midst, who would be to them a true father, as Abbé Balley had been. But M. Vianney, when the Archbishop of Lyons offered him the succession of his venerable master, refused to accept it. "I am unworthy to fill his place," replied the young priest. "He was a saint. I must go away, and let some one more fit come here to serve the parish." He was so urgent in his entreaties that the Archbishop yielded to them, and, two months after M. Balley's death, named Abbé Vianney parish priest of the little village of Ars. Abbé Courbon, the Vicar-General of the diocese, who had overruled the hesitation of the examiners in admitting M. Vianney to Holy Orders, said in giving him faculties for his new parish: "There is very little love of God at Ars; go and put some there." We shall see how this command of his superior was obeyed.

On February 9, 1818, M. Vianney set out

toward his unknown parish. The village of Dombes, buried in the midst of fields now covered with snow, was not easy to find. The wayfarer wandered along by the banks of the Fontblin until he lost his way. At last a little shepherd met him, and led him back to the right path. The Curé observed the towers of a feudal castle in the distance, and asked who lived there. The answer was, "Mademoiselle d'Ars. They call her the mother of the poor."—"That is a beautiful name," remarked the priest; and he walked on. This amiable lady was almost the first acquaintance he made at Ars, and he soon discovered that the beautiful name was the true expression of a beautiful life. His noble parishioner was a type of the *grande dame* of old Catholic France. Her small figure was full of grace and dignity; she was *spirituelle*, clever, and hospitable as a patriarch. Her devotedness to the poor made a great bond between her and the new pastor, and their souls were soon drawn together in a holy friendship.

Mademoiselle d'Ars was over sixty years of age and delicately framed, but this did not prevent her wading up to her ankles in snow to early Mass in the winter time. Seeing her



arrive one wet morning soaked through, the Curé remarked that she ought to have some sort of little carriage. "M. le Curé, the poor can't afford to give me one," was the reply. And it expressed admirably the nature of her relation toward them. Every penny she could scrape from her own necessities belonged by right, she considered, to the poor; but, not content with giving them gold and silver, she gave her personal service when they needed it: she swept out their rooms when they were sick, and even washed and cooked for them if they had no one to perform these offices. Such a soul was sure to appreciate M. Vianney, and she soon held him in profound veneration. "Pray hard that he may be spared," she would say to the poor; "for if he dies we shall never see his like again."

This valiant woman was a great help to the pastor, who soon discovered that there was indeed but little piety in his parish. There were a few fervent souls who made consoling exceptions, but the contrary rule was general; the people were addicted to sinful ways. M. Vianney's intense devotion to the Eucharist was his grand resource in this grave and pressing responsibility. He resolved to make a crusade

for the conversion of his erring flock by inaugurating perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The scheme was warmly adopted by Mademoiselle d'Ars and a few other devout souls. They persuaded some pious young girls to come for a quarter of an hour's adoration daily; these in turn induced their parents to come, and in a short time the little church was seldom without a watcher before the tabernacle. One poor laborer was a subject of deep consolation and delight to the Curé. He used to spend hours on his knees before the tabernacle, his eyes fixed on the little golden door, but never moving his lips. "What do you say to Our Lord all the time, my friend?" the Curé asked him one day.—"I say just nothing at all," replied the simple soul; "I only look at Him, and He looks at me." The Curé of Ars loved to tell his friends about this simple adorer of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and would dilate on the beauty of his innocent, childlike prayer.

The parish soon began to change its aspect under the influence of the pastor's holiness and zeal. His exhortations were so ardent that the people said of him: "He draws our souls to God whether we will or no." He

"beguiled" them into loving the Blessed Virgin in spite of their tepidity and sloth. One day a group of giddy girls, who had reluctantly consented to come to confession, were waiting their turn. The Curé came unexpectedly out of the sacristy, and said: "My children, let us say our Rosary." He knelt down in the midst of them and began to recite it, and their hearts were moved to sudden compunction. They wept bitter tears, and resolved thenceforth to lead new lives; and so fervent was their repentance that the Curé founded the Confraternity of the Rosary there and then.

The conversion of this parish, where there was "so little love of God," was the grand miracle of his life; but many gracious minor ones were wrought in the early days of his sojourn there, and began to prepare the way for it. The first that is recorded has a perfume of the "Little Flowers of St. Francis." Mademoiselle d'Ars took the Curé a bunch of lilies on his *fête* (St. John's Day); he laid them outside the window in the sun, and forgot all about them, until eight days afterward he saw them there as fresh as if they had just been gathered. On some one present exclaiming

at the wonder, the Curé remarked with a smile: "Why, Mademoiselle d'Ars must be a saint!"

But people were beginning to find out where the saint was. The Vicomte d'Ars, brother of the châtelaine, came to stay at the castle, and, being a man of great piety and of a spiritual mind, at once recognized the sanctity of the young parish priest. He used to say that to see M. Vianney celebrate Mass was enough to convert the most obdurate sinner. He looked, in truth, like a seraph on the altar. Even when saying his breviary his face was luminous as an angel's; the children used to watch him, and they said he had a way of turning his face toward the tabernacle and smiling, "as if the good God were telling him something pleasant." Catherine Lassagne, who was in the service of the presbytery, used to hide in a dark corner that she might see him at his prayers. "Many a time," she said, "I watched him until it seemed to me that Our Lord must have been visible to him. It made me feel such a sinner when I saw him in the early dawn on his knees before the tabernacle, his wan, worn features wearing such a light on them—such an expression—as I never could describe!"



These long watches before the tabernacle were the weapons with which the pastor fought and wrestled for the salvation of his flock. One of the great enemies he had to fight against was that universal one, love of amusement. He obtained many signal victories over this insidious and powerful demon, but never, perhaps, a more triumphant one than that which took place on the annual *fête* of the village. The people from time immemorial held high festival "in honor" of their patron saint—eating and drinking double rations, dancing and making merry from early morn, and carrying on the rejoicings at night in a ball that lasted till daybreak. This last part of the festivities was the Curé's special horror; he knew it was the ruin of many innocent souls, and he resolved to do away with it at all costs. The mayor, who was a good Christian, agreed with him, and promised to forbid the ball; but several young men of the village went to the prefect and obtained a counter-permission to have it. This left no appeal, the mayor said. But the Curé, who had reserve forces, was not to be beaten. The day came, and the merry-making was kept up with the usual spirit until evening. Then the

candles were lighted, and the fiddling began, and the young men assembled for the ball. But, lo! there were no partners to dance with. The girls were all in church, saying the Rosary with M. le Curé, instead of going to the dance where the devil was waiting for them. The Curé had the mothers and daughters on his side, and the young men took their defeat good-humoredly. This gave the death-blow to the annual ball.

The same fate befell a number of other wicked and dangerous customs. The observance of Sunday, for instance, was neglected: the shops were kept open and work was done just as on week-days. The Curé never ceased praying and preaching till he made the people see the sinfulness of this disobedience to God and the Church, and by degrees persuaded them to hold the day sacred. More than one miracle was granted to help them to this good resolution. Once, in harvest time, while the people were at High Mass, the wind rose and blew with violence; heavy clouds gathered, and everything announced a storm. The Curé ascended the pulpit, and forbade his flock to touch the corn that was lying on the ground, promising them in the name of God that they

should have plenty of fine weather to carry on the harvest if they kept holy the Sunday. They did so, and, contrary to the prophecies of all the weather-wise elders, the storm passed away, the sun shone out, and there was no rain for a fortnight.

By the same gentle but powerful means he contrived to do away with the two public houses that were the curse of Ars. The people, hearkening to his words, gave up drink; and those agents of the devil, the venders of alcohol, finding their trade falling off, shut up their shops, and carried their poison elsewhere. The change worked in Ars by their departure was incalculable. The people went regularly to church, they frequented the Sacraments, and the blessing of God rested visibly upon the village. Some years later an inhabitant of the country declared that he was in the habit of walking through the fields in harvest time, when they were full of laboring men and women, and that he never once heard a profane or unbecoming expression. He happened to remark on this to one of the laborers, and observed that it spoke highly for the moral character of the population; but the peasant answered with straightforward simplicity: "Ah,

Monsieur, we are no better here than in other villages, but we should be ashamed to misbehave ourselves so close to a saint!"



## VI.

## HE IS MIRACULOUSLY HELPED.

THE Curé of Ars soon found that his church was too small to contain the whole population of the village that now crowded to every service on Sunday, so he resolved to add a chapel to it. He built the chapel, and dedicated it to St. John; but when this was done it had to be paid for, and the Curé had no money. Every penny he had collected had gone straight from his pocket to the poor, and he found himself absolutely without funds when the architect sent in his bill. He begged for a few days' time, and then, taking his beads, he went out for a walk. He was very much distressed, for he knew not where to turn for the money; and he was full of remorse for having got himself into this dilemma. Suddenly, as he stepped from a field out upon the highroad, a stranger rode up, and, stopping his horse, accosted him with a gracious salutation, and inquired after his health. "I am well enough, Monsieur," replied the holy man; "but I am dreadfully worried."—"Your parish-

ioners are hard to manage, I suppose?"—"No: on the contrary, they are very docile and good. That is not what is worrying me; but I have built a chapel and I have no money to pay the architect." The stranger made no reply; and the Curé, thinking he was annoyed by what looked like an indirect appeal for help, bowed and was passing on, when the other said: "M. le Curé, take this to pay for your chapel. I commend myself to your prayers." He slipped a large sum of money into M. Vianney's hand, and rode away without waiting to hear his thanks. The Curé never saw him again, and never heard who he was.

This was the first of a succession of mysterious messengers who were to come to his aid in difficulties of the kind. He bestowed alms, founded good works, and gave away money with the prodigal generosity of one who draws upon boundless resources. It happened from time to time that the supply stopped, and then there followed a period of dark anxiety to those who reckoned on the Curé to meet imperative demands. But he was never disturbed by these delays; he simply turned to his "consuls," as he called the saints, and summoned them to send in the necessary

funds; and though he was sometimes obliged to "din it into their ears," as he said, they never failed to keep his appointments. They sent the money in ways that would almost suggest the exercise of a sense of humor in the saintly consuls; they stowed it away in holes and corners, as if to give their holy client the pleasure of a surprise. Catherine Lassagne says he used to go about diligently searching for gold and bank-notes, as if he knew they were hid away and had only to be hunted for; he frequently came on large sums in the pockets of his coat that had been empty for days; once he was attracted by something glittering in the heap of dead ashes in the kitchen grate, and on poking amongst them he found a quantity of gold coins; he laughed gently at this trick of his consuls, just as a child might on finding the object of a game of hide-and-seek.

He was in terrible straits once for a sum of three thousand francs that was due on a certain day. The children of his orphanage began a novena to St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist, but they came to the eighth day and the consuls had done nothing. The Curé said to a friend in the course of the afternoon: "I am greatly worried; I owe three

thousand francs that must be paid to-morrow. One should beware of going in debt." Next morning, when coming from his catechism, he met this friend, and hurried away from him with the remark: "I must go and count my money." He went into the house, walking like one who carried a heavy weight. Presently he came out of his room, and said to his friend, who was waiting below: "Well, we have found lots of money! The load was so heavy that I could hardly walk. It weighed down my pockets; I had to hold them up with both hands. I was afraid the people would see me." His friend asked him where he got all this money, and on the Curé replying evasively, with a smile, that he had "found it somewhere," the other said earnestly: "M. le Curé, I wish you would teach me how to perform miracles." The holy man's countenance suddenly grew grave, and after a moment's reflection he said: "My friend, there is nothing that disconcerts and baffles the devil, and draws down grace from God, like fasting and watching. When I was able to follow my own will on this head I obtained everything I wanted." Here the tears streamed down his face, and he continued: "Now, I can't go



without food as I used to do. I grow so weak that I can't speak."

Do what he would to keep secret the wonderful things he was permitted to do, they leaked out; the fame of his miracles spread, and the ecclesiastical authorities began to think that such marvellous gifts ought not to be confined within such a narrow sphere as the parish of Ars,—that they needed a wider field in order to reap a richer harvest. M. Vianney was unexpectedly named to an important parish in Beaujolais. The appointment was a shock to him, inasmuch as he fancied himself too insignificant and worthless to be the object of his superior's notice at all,—above all, of anything like promotion; but to his parishioners the news came like a calamity. The population were in despair; they insisted that something must be done to prevent the archiepiscopal order from being carried out, and Mademoiselle d'Ars heroically declared her readiness to go and "strangle" the Vicar-General, if that would help. Meantime M. Vianney, who was equally willing to stay or to go, as God should decide, went to visit his new post, and as no counter-order had come from the Archbishop he made ready to leave Ars. His few books and clothes

were packed up, and one morning his shabby little furniture was carried down to the boat which was to convey him to his destination. But, suddenly and rapidly, the water rose and overflowed its banks, so that it became impossible to reach the boat, and M. Vianney was forced to return to the presbytery. The next day, the flood having disappeared, he set out again for the boat; but the same accident repeated itself, and he was again driven back. The population, ready to see in this remarkable incident a sign that he was not to leave Ars, sent a deputation to the Archbishop, earnestly entreating him to let their pastor remain with them; and the prelate, recognizing the hand of Divine Providence in the event, granted their desire.

## VII.

## HIS MISSIONARY LABORS—"LA PROVIDENCE."

FROM this date his life took root amongst his people, and the possibility of going from them to any other parish seemed set aside definitively; their joys became his joys, their sorrows his sorrows, and their mutual relationship strengthened into a union to be broken only by death. His pity for their material sufferings was that of a true father, but his love for their souls amounted to a passion; he wrestled with God for them in tears and fastings and watchings. Catherine, his servant, says that he prayed for their conversion sometimes for days and nights together, as if he were praying for his own life. The sight of their sins was almost more than he could bear. He accused himself of being the cause of them; it was his unworthiness that scandalized his people, and stopped the current of divine grace. In order to turn away the divine anger that his sins drew upon the village, he used to invite constantly some priest whom he believed to be very holy to come and stay at Ars, and preach to the people, and

urge them to repentance. While these short missions lasted he redoubled his prayers, his tears, and his austerities; and wonderful were the fruits often obtained from these efforts of his burning zeal. After one mission the whole population seemed won over to God; they crowded round the confessional day and night, and at the closing exercises the Curé wept with joy in the pulpit, although so exhausted with fatigue from fasting and working that he could hardly stand.

But his labors were not confined to Ars. Neighboring parishes were constantly calling for him to preach and confess; when any priest fell ill the Curé of Ars was sent for, as a matter of course; and the people, who venerated him as a saint, were ingenious in inventing pretexts for detaining him in their midst. Thus for several years he was in the habit of ministering regularly in three parishes besides his own. He never reckoned with his poor feeble body. When souls called to him, from no matter what distance, he would roll up his surplice, and in the depth of winter set off through the snow, arrive soaked and faint, confess and preach without thinking of rest, pass the night in the confessional, and tramp



home again the next morning. And if, coming along the road in the bitter cold, he met a beggar more ragged and poverty-stricken than himself, he would immediately take off some portion of his own clothing—his cloak, his shoes, his shabby muffler,—and bestow it upon him.

During a great mission of the Chartreux Fathers at Trévoux, which lasted five weeks, the Curé of Ars performed prodigies of work that only supernatural help could have enabled him to live through. The reputation of holiness which he enjoyed far beyond Ars drew crowds to his confessional at Trévoux, and these penitents were almost always men of the educated classes—magistrates, lawyers, government functionaries. One day the crowd in the chapel where he was hearing confessions was so dense that the confessional was pushed forward, priest and penitents in it. He used to sit until he was almost incapable of rising from fatigue. A gentleman who was giving him hospitality at Trévoux, fearing that he would fall ill from exhaustion, went to the church to bring him away; he succeeded with difficulty in getting him out of the confessional, and as soon as they were in the street the saintly Curé fell down, not in a faint, but from sheer

weakness; his kind-hearted host had to carry him home and administer a cordial to him.

On the eve of the general Communion this same gentleman, M. Morel, went to the church at nine in the evening to bring the servant of God home to rest for a few hours before he embarked on the tremendous fatigue of the next morning; but he found the chapel so blocked that he could not get to the confessional. He went away and returned at midnight, to find the crowd just as dense. He sat down and waited till two in the morning. Seeing there was no chance of the Curé being set free, he pushed his way up to the confessional, knocked at it, and said out loud: "M. le Curé, I must carry you away now whether you will or not." Upon which several cried out: "If you take him away, we will never come back, and the sin will be upon your head."—"What!" exclaimed M. Morel, "he was here till midnight yesterday, and back here again at four in the morning. And he did not lie down between times; his bed was not touched; he had to say his office, and he has to say it now; and he will be back here again at four. Would any of you here do as much, tell me?" This appeal silenced the impatient penitents. M. Morel

opened the door of the confessional, and helped out the Curé, more dead than alive.

The miracles of mercy wrought in countless souls during this mission carried the fame of M. Vianney's sanctity all over France, and the result was that from this time forth he never had one hour that he could call his own.

It was, no doubt, part of his gift of miracles which prevented his parish suffering in the smallest degree from these external missions. Incredible as it may seem, in spite of the overwhelming claims which beset the Curé from so many directions, he was as assiduous and successful in the management of Ars as if nothing diverted his attention from it. He had found the village in great material poverty, quite destitute of charitable foundations, and he had set to work at once to supply this want. His first care was to provide a refuge for little orphan girls. He performed miracles of charity in carrying out this work. Poor as the poorest orphan that he sought to shelter, he contrived to pay a considerable sum for a house to receive them. The asylum was appropriately called "La Providence." It was supported solely by the bounty of Providence. One by one the

pious women of the parish came with their offerings, both of money and service, until the institution—which began, like all such divine works, in the smallest and humblest way—was so large that the original house could not contain the number of orphans who begged for admittance. “We must build!” said the Curé. And he constituted himself architect, carpenter, and mason, working like a hired journeyman, and with a skill that amazed all beholders. He made the mortar, he carried the stones; he never spared himself, going from this hard manual work to the no less arduous work of the confessional. His indomitable courage and charity were speedily and abundantly rewarded. In an incredibly short time the building rose, necessities poured in, and sixty more orphans were sheltered.

For five and twenty years the servant of God supported this asylum without any certain funds, just trusting to Providence for the money as it was wanted; and his trust was never disappointed. When ordinary help failed God sent extraordinary aid. Once there remained absolutely nothing for the large household on the morrow but a little measure of flour that could not have given bread to a dozen



orphans. The directress, in despair, went to the Curé. He was silent for a moment, and then said: "Put the yeast into the flour that remains, and leave it to rise, and to-morrow make the bread as usual." She obeyed the first injunction, and waited in patient anxiety to see what would come of it. Next morning she began to make the bread, and according as she worked the dough it rose and swelled, until at last it overflowed the great kneading-trough, and produced ten huge loaves of five-and-twenty pounds each—as much, in fact, as if the handful of flour had been a sackful. The servant of God attributed the miracle to St. Francis Regis, whom he had constituted protector of the asylum, and remarked humbly: "God permitted it too, perhaps, to rebuke my want of faith in His providence."

God certainly sent him abundant rebukes of a similar kind, for the simple chronicles of the Providence contain innumerable records of like miracles: as when one day the wine ran out from the new barrel, carelessly tapped, and flooded the cellar. The dismayed servant hastened with the bad news to the Curé; he smiled calmly, and told her that God, who sent the wine, could put it back into the barrel

if it were needed for His orphans. On returning to the cellar, she found the barrel full and the floor dry.

Again and again, when the bills came in and he had not a cent with which to pay them, he would take his Rosary and go for a walk, often meeting some mysterious benefactor, who handed him the precise sum he wanted. When any one was in trouble, whether about temporal or spiritual things, he would cheer him with a word about the efficacy of trust in God. "It is our confidence that God wants," he kept repeating; "if we only trusted Him we could make Him do anything for us." And his usual last word was, "Take your beads and go for a walk."

The system on which the Providence was conducted illustrates admirably the power of the strong faith and common-sense of the holy man. The house was devoid of anything like "appearances." It was a plain building, furnished with the barest necessities, only differing in its perfect cleanliness from the houses of the poor whom it sheltered. The food was of the coarsest; the orphans slept on straw, sat on hard deal benches, and ate black bread, as they would have done in the homes

of their parents. The question of appearances, of exterior show, so supreme in our day with all charitable institutions, was utterly ignored by the Curé of Ars. The orphans had no uniform: they wore whatever clothes they could get, the elders of the village being glad to contribute their well-worn garments to be cut and contrived into gowns for them. Everything remained rough and shabby in their lives, so that they were not unfitted for the hardships they had to face on leaving the Providence. The only luxuries they enjoyed there without stint were kindness and cleanliness. The Curé of Ars' principle was that the poor should be braced to bear their appointed poverty, and taught how to cleanse and sweeten its external conditions as much as possible; but he was intolerant of any attempt to cheat it of its real character by making it look what it was not.

Those who visited this asylum of his always carried away an impression of the deepest edification. Everything in it was perfectly *natural*. The children were all poor together, and they were being trained to endure their poverty, and to help one another in a variety of ways; so that the older and more intelligent

girls became auxiliaries of the mistresses, often very valuable ones, washing and dressing the little toddlers, and teaching them and keeping them in order. The absence of rules and regulations was one of the most conspicuous features of the house. It may be that nothing short of the benign influence of a saint could have enabled them to be so completely dispensed with; but certain it is that no charitable institution, no house of reform, ever brought forth sweeter or more lasting fruits in the souls it fashioned than did this happy-go-lucky home for the orphans of Ars.

But if the Providence was free of external rules, it was surrounded and penetrated by the law that reigns within and holds hearts under its empire. These poor children, who had for the most part grown up like little animals, untaught and unkempt, were as soft as wax in the hands of their adopted father. He inspired them with such a horror of vice that they were contrite as mature penitents for their sins, and came to love with a kind of personal, human love the God who had forgiven and rescued them. Few things delighted them more than being allowed to spend an hour in reparation before the Blessed Sacrament. If any scandal occurred



in the neighborhood, or if they heard of a sacrilege committed in any distant place, the older girls not unfrequently begged leave to pass the night in prayer, relieving one another every two hours before the Tabernacle. Their desire for mortification was so great that the mistresses had to control it, lest they should injure their health. They sometimes died the death of saints. One of them, whose early childhood had been miserably abandoned, had imbibed, with a salutary horror of sin, an overpowering terror of death; but when she fell dangerously ill, and heard that she was going to die, her fear was suddenly changed to joy. "I could not have believed it was so good to die!" she exclaimed, and began to sing a canticle. She died singing.

These were the kind of pupils the Curé of Ars formed. His influence over their souls was almost irresistible. When he had an hour's leisure during the week he would go to the asylum to give them a little discourse, and his presence at the door of the workroom was welcomed with a shout of delight. "M. le Curé is going to talk to us about the good God!" and they were immediately all eyes and ears not to lose a word of the precious "talk."

Before it was over there were nearly always tears flowing, and brave resolutions were taken against self and sin. It was here that the Curé delivered many of those wonderful instructions on the catechism which have been preserved in fragments, and which have moved so many hearts since they were spoken at the Providence.

The Curé of Ars was not eloquent; he had not even a natural flow of language, and he was often ungrammatical; but the power of his words was the more extraordinary from the absence of natural gifts. When he spoke on his favorite themes—the love and goodness of God and the horrible nature of sin—his language was like a living flame. Even in print those “catechisms” have a glow that is full of the warmth of his ardent faith; but spoken, they were more effective than the finest and most polished oratory.

When he began to dilate on the Holy Eucharist his face shone and his voice trembled; at times his whole body shook, and his intense emotion communicated itself to his hearers. One memorable instruction still lives in the traditions of Ars, owing to the impression it made on his young audience. It contained the following passage:

“My children, there is nothing so grand as the Eucharist. Offer up a prayer when you have God in your heart: He can refuse you nothing when you offer Him His Son and the merits of His death and passion. My children, you remember the story I told you about that holy priest who was praying for his friend. God, apparently, had made known to him that his friend was in purgatory, so he thought the best thing he could do would be to offer up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for his soul. At the moment of Consecration he took the Sacred Host in his fingers, and said, ‘Now, Holy and Eternal Father, let us make an exchange: You hold the soul of my friend in purgatory, and I hold the body of Your Son in my hands; well, deliver my friend, and I offer You in his place Your Divine Son with His merits and death and passion.’ And it came to pass that at the moment of the Elevation he beheld the soul of his friend ascending to heaven, shining with glory. Well, my children, when we want to obtain anything from God let us do the same thing; after Holy Communion let us offer Him His beloved Son with all the merits of His passion and death. He will not be able to refuse us anything.”

The children used to say, "When M. le Curé begins to talk about the joy of Holy Communion he can never stop." Sometimes his ardor overcame him, and he would burst into tears and clasp his hands, looking up as if he saw our Blessed Lord before him. No wonder souls were stirred and kindled by such love as this. The fruits of these simple instructions spread beyond the walls of the asylum: people from the village crowded into the refectory or the workroom, where, seated at the table amidst his orphans, he taught them divine truths; and by degrees strangers came, and it was held a great privilege to get a place amongst the rustic audience.



## VIII.

## HIS FASTS.

THE fame of the servant of God was spreading far and wide. His austerities were increasing with his years, until Claudine Renard, a good woman who served him, wondered how he lived; he ate nothing, and daily grew more ingenious in tormenting his emaciated body. Claudine did not live at the presbytery, but in a house close by, so that M. le Curé had the upper hand of her in the matter of starving and punishing himself. When with difficulty she obtained leave to cook some vegetables or eggs for his dinner, he would tell her to go as soon as the food was served, and no sooner was her back turned than he opened the door and gave it to some poor person. A few boiled potatoes, a bit of mouldy black bread and a cup of water made up his usual meal. The potatoes were boiled once a week, and kept in a pot that was often filled with mould, so long were they left there.

He used to put his mattress on the floor, and sleep on the hard straw of the ticking under-

neath; but finding that this manœuvre was discovered he left the bed undisturbed, and went to the loft, where he slept on the boards, with a stone for his pillow. His principle was to drive his body until it could go no further. After a long fast, when his limbs were so weakened that they tottered and refused to carry him, he would take a handful of flour and make a kind of pancake appropriately called *matefaim* (tame-hunger),—a refection worthy of an anchorite, for it consists in a paste of flour and water fried on a griddle, without any seasoning whatever. Catherine Lassagne—who was the servant, officially, at the presbytery in his latter years—relates how, when thousands were flocking from all parts of the world to Ars, the holy man, overpowered with work, often exclaimed, with a sigh of regret, "How happy I was in the old days! When I wanted to dine I lost no time about it. Three *matefaims* did the business. While I was cooking the second I ate the first, and while I was eating the second I cooked the third. I finished my meal and drank a little water while I raked out the fire."

His rigorous penances knew no bounds when he wanted to obtain the conversion of a sinner.

A priest once consulted him as to the amount of sacramental penance that ought to be imposed on a grievous sinner with a view to adjusting the principle of atonement with due regard to human weakness. "Listen," he replied; "here is my receipt: give them an easy penance, and do the rest yourself."

He was often heard to say that there was no penance the devil hated and feared like fasting and watching. The discipline and corporal mortification were nothing compared to privation of food and sleep. "Many a time I experienced the truth of this," he said to a friend, "when I was alone for five or six years, and could do as I liked, without being watched by any one. What graces Our Lord used to grant me then! I got anything I wanted from Him."

He never ate more than two pounds of bread during Lent. For a time he tried to give up bread altogether. One day Claudine Renard drove her cow into the presbytery garden, and caught the Curé in the act of pulling some grass and eating it. She cried out in dismay. "It is an experiment I have been making," he replied, laughing; "but it is not a success." Thrown off his guard once with a young priest

who was consulting him about fasting, he remarked: "We are not made like beasts, after all, and we can not feed like them. I tried to do it by eating nothing but grass, but I grew too weak. It seems that bread is necessary for man." His Bishop, in conversing on spiritual things with him, said one day: "You never tried to live on herbs and roots as our predecessors, the Fathers of the desert and the solitaries of Thebaid, did?" "Monseigneur," replied the Curé, "I tried it for eight days, but I could not go on with it. You see, I am not a saint like them."

When Mademoiselle d'Ars and other intimates remonstrated with him on his unmerciful treatment of his body, he would answer, laughingly: "Oh, I have a sturdy carcass! You have no idea how much it can bear." The poor carcass kept sturdy on a *régime* of chronic starvation; its utter exhaustion was manifested by the tottering gait of the holy priest, and the increasing weakness of his voice. Toward evening the voice grew so faint that it was scarcely audible when he said night prayers in the church. Some one asked him why it was that his voice, which was strong enough comparatively when he preached, was so feeble



when he said prayers. "It is," replied the Curé, "because when I preach I have often to do with deaf people or people who drop asleep; but when I pray I have to do with God, and God is not deaf."

Hospitality, that evangelical element of charity, was not wanting in the Curé of Ars. He was always ready to set aside his more than monastic austerity when a brother priest or some relation came to visit him. On these rare occasions he would send off to Mademoiselle d'Ars and beg the alms of a dish or two for his guest, and he would make believe to partake of what was on the table. Sometimes there was no time to send up to the castle, and then Claudine did the best she could in her own kitchen—for there was never any fire in the presbytery hearth. A venerable priest, who came down on the Curé unexpectedly in this way, describes how his host entertained him with an omelet and cheese and a bottle of wine, encouraging him graciously to eat by nibbling a little himself at the food.

When the asylum came to be in full activity, M. le Curé bethought him that it would save time and trouble if he took his meals there. The idea of being fed with the poor on charity

had a certain fascination for him, and the thought of having the Curé share their food was delightful to the orphans. After a while, however, he found the food prepared for him was too luxurious; he complained to the mistresses that they were wanting in charity toward his soul by taking such care of his body—though, in truth, the food he complained of as too dainty was such as the poorest peasant in the parish would have found plain.

The new arrangement had one great advantage: it compelled him to be comparatively regular in taking some sort of nourishment. Sometimes he was so exhausted on leaving the confessional as to be obliged to sit down on the way to the asylum from sheer inability to go on walking; and then he would cheer up the poor carcass as if it were a donkey he was apostrophizing. "Gee-up, old Adam! Come along, Colon! Up now, be a man!" Colon was the name of a drunkard who, when he fell down from drink, used to implore his legs to get up and go on.

The Curé's love of poverty and mortification controlled his clothes as completely as his food. He wore them till they fell to pieces on him. He had that instinct of cleanliness which seems

natural to the majority of saints, but his total contempt for his personal appearance gave him the air of being dirty. He never had but one *soutane*, which he allowed to be washed occasionally and patched unlimitedly; for while it held together he never would have a new one. A change of *soutanes* he looked upon as a shocking extravagance. He wore his hat until it had neither shape nor color, and no brush or blacking ever touched his shoes from the time he put them on till they fell to pieces. When he presented himself at the diocesan meetings and other assemblies of his brother clergy, his dilapidated appearance provoked amusement, to which his parishioners were a little sensitive; but when they represented to M. Vianney the propriety of having some concern for his own dignity, he would laugh merrily at the conceit. "What! my clothes are quite good enough for me. Anything is good enough for the Curé of Ars, and people know that. Who cares how I look? I am only what I am." He was in all things, great and small, the disciple of Him who despised this world, and taught us to learn of Him to be meek and lowly of heart.

## IX.

## HE IS PERSECUTED BY THE DEVIL.

BUT the life of a saint is not merely a series of acts of virtue: it is above all a school of suffering. A saint is called upon to suffer, in the natural and supernatural order, more than a host of ordinary Christians together. In the case of the Curé of Ars these sufferings were of so awful and extraordinary a character that we shudder even to hear about them. He had aspired to imitate the anchorites of the desert in their fastings and macerations, and in this he assuredly succeeded; he was also destined to resemble them in the persecution he underwent from the demons; and we must go back to the experiences of St. Anthony and St. Hilarion to find a parallel for the rage with which the evil spirits tormented and terrorized him. His courage and faith in sustaining this persecution added another trait of resemblance between the Curé of Ars and the grand old veterans of Thebaid.

He had been six years in his quiet little parish when this marvellous phase of his life began.



He himself relates the incident. "The first time the demon came to torment me was at nine in the evening, as I was going to bed. Three loud knocks resounded at the door of the courtyard, as if some one wanted to break it down with an enormous hatchet. I opened the window and cried out, 'Who is there?' There was no answer; so I went quietly to bed, commending myself to God, to the Blessed Virgin, and my Guardian Angel. I hardly dropped off asleep when there came three more knocks, still more violent, but this time at the house door, at the bottom of the stairs leading to my room. I jumped up, and again called out, 'Who is there?' No one answered.

"When this noise began I fancied it must be robbers who had designs on M. le Vicomte d'Ars' handsome vestments, and I thought it right to take precautions; so I begged two courageous men to come and sleep in the house, in order to help me in case of need. They came several nights running; they heard the same noises, but could discover nothing, and were convinced that all this row was caused by something else than the malice of men. I soon found out the truth of this; for one winter's night, after a heavy fall of snow, three

tremendous knocks resounded in the middle of the night. I sprang out of bed, seized the banister and ran down stairs, making sure this time to catch the malefactors and call for help. But to my amazement I saw nobody; I heard nothing; and, moreover, I discovered no trace of any footsteps on the snow. . . . I had no longer any doubt after this that it was the devil who wanted to frighten me. I abandoned myself to the will of God, praying Him to be my defender and my guardian, and to be near me with His angels when the enemy came to torment me."

If the object of the evil spirits was to frighten the holy man, they succeeded. He was so terrified that his life became a misery to him. He used to tremble, so that the bed shook under him, while they kept up their mysterious noises outside and inside the house. He faded away under this terror till he was like a withered branch, and his flock became seriously alarmed. Some courageous persons volunteered to come and mount guard at the presbytery, and sleep in the room next to him; while several young men took their fire-arms, and went secretly up to the steeple in order to command a better view of the neighborhood, and thus defeat

any attempt to attack the house. But they saw nothing, though their ears were deafened with noises. Some of them were stricken with mortal fear. One stout fellow named André Verchère, the village cartwright, when his turn came, stationed himself with his gun in the room next the Curé's. On the stroke of midnight a frightful explosion was heard in the room where he was watching: it was as if the furniture were being smashed to pieces by violent hammer strokes. The poor cartwright began to cry out in terror for the Curé, who hurried in; but they could discover nothing.

M. Vianney, being now convinced beyond any doubt that this nocturnal disturbance was the work of the demons, sent away the watchers; he assured them they could not help him and were therefore only losing their night's rest to no purpose. He threw himself into the arms of Divine Providence, and by degrees grew accustomed to the trial, inasmuch as it ceased to terrify him. But according as he grew in faith and fortitude the demon increased the violence of his persecution. His habit was, soon after midnight, to knock three times at the presbytery door by way of announcing himself and waking up his victim. He then

made a terrific row on the staircase before coming into the room, where he would shake the bed-curtains till the wonder was they did not fall to pieces; he would pull about the chairs, flinging them against one another, upsetting everything,—all the while heaping abusive names on the servant of God, threatening him with hell and everlasting torments. Sometimes he took to hammering big nails into the floor; then his fancy was to saw wood, to tap on the bottom of the tin pail in which the holy man washed; but always making, in one way or another, a racket that might be truly called infernal.

One night, after rattling a torrent of hail-stones on the floor, the devil simulated a flock of sheep grazing in the room above; after a time the noise of the fourfooted creatures moving over the Curé's head, and munching the grass, became intolerable, and destroyed all chance of sleep. At last the holy man cried out: "My God, I willingly make Thee the sacrifice of a few hours' sleep to obtain the conversion of sinners." Instantly the noise ceased, the sheep departed as by enchantment, and the tired victim got a little rest.

We can picture to ourselves the excitement



all these supernatural manifestations caused in the village. The Curé was supported by the sympathy of his people, who believed and revered him. They had heard enough with their own ears to put the facts beyond the possibility of doubt, but even if they had not had the evidence of their senses the word of the Curé was enough. They looked upon him not only as a saint, but also as the wisest and most sensible of men.

It may seem strange, although it is consistent with God's usual training of His saints, that those who doubted the Curé's statements, who ridiculed the testimony of the honest village-folk, and treated the whole thing as an invention or a delusion, were the clergy. They set it down to mental hallucinations caused by M. Vianney's unnatural manner of life. "No wonder he hears sounds and sees visions: he is delirious from hunger," they said. "Let him eat and sleep like other people, and the devils will leave him alone. His nerves and his imagination are overwrought by physical exhaustion and weakness."

The man of God bore with this contradiction uncomplainingly, trusting to God to make known the truth in His own time, if it were

necessary. God saw, apparently, that it was necessary, and He had in reserve a signal triumph for His servant. A venerable parish priest named Abbé Granger, who had made acquaintance with M. Vianney on his arrival at Ars, and conceived a profound esteem for him, invited him to preach the exercises of the Jubilee in his parish of St. Trivier. The Curé accepted the invitation, and for three weeks worked at the conversion of souls with apostolic zeal and marvellous success. There were a number of other priests staying at the presbytery at the same time; they had heard of the demoniacal annoyances to which the Curé of Ars was subjected, but they treated the story with contempt; they were unanimous in attributing it to the diseased state of his nerves and general health, brought on by fasting, and they more than once alluded jestingly to the affair. One evening, however, they grew more earnest in discussing it, and some were so far carried away by their indignant disbelief in the story as to be rude to M. Vianney; they called him a visionary and a maniac, and told him that he had only to eat properly if he wanted to be rid of his devils. The gentle sufferer, thankful to be humiliated, took it all

without a word of self-defence, and after a while slipped away to his room.

In due time the household retired to rest, but at midnight everybody was roused by a most terrific noise: the windows and doors clattered, the walls swayed to and fro, and the house rocked as if it were going to fall. In a moment all the priests were up, and by a common impulse rushed to the Curé of Ars' room. He was awake, lying quietly in his bed. "Get up!" they cried; "get up! The house is falling!"—"Oh, I know what it is!" the Curé replied, smiling. "You can go back to bed; there is nothing to fear; the house will not fall." The noises and the rocking instantly ceased, and all grew perfectly quiet. About an hour later a loud ring at the front door pealed through the silence. Abbé Vianney hurried down to answer it, and found a poor man who had walked several leagues to confess to him. The servant of God threw on his clothes and went to the church, where he spent the remainder of the night hearing confessions until it was time to say Mass.

The coincidence of the arrival of the penitent with the uproar of the demons was characteristic of their behavior. Whenever divine grace was

going to put M. Vianney in the way of converting some great sinner they redoubled the violence of their attacks. He grew so familiar with this trick that when the nocturnal storm was increased to unusual fury, and the night passed without his getting one moment's respite, he always expected to find the explanation of it in the morning in the shape of a penitent at the door—some hardened sinner who had come a long way to confess. And he was seldom disappointed.

These supernatural manifestations were now so well known in the village that people, young and old, spoke of them as of other incidents in their daily lives; and the Curé of Ars, in his simplicity, did not attempt to disguise them. He sometimes turned the trial to account in his own way. One day, giving an instruction on the Sign of the Cross, he spoke of how powerful it was against evil spirits. "The devil is cunning," he said, "but he is not strong; one Sign of the Cross puts him to flight. Only three days ago he was making an infernal racket over my head; you would have thought all the coaches in Lyons were rolling over the floor. . . . A troop of devils were shaking my door, chattering like an army of Austrians.



I did not understand one word of their gibberish. I made the Sign of the Cross, and they all fled." Another day he said, in order to encourage a soul under temptation: "That is nothing; the devil hoisted me up into the air the other night. I felt the bed going away from me; but I made the Sign of the Cross, and the *grappin* left me." *Grappin* was his nickname for the Evil One; he never called him anything else.

The holy man went to preach a mission in a neighboring town, and the *grappin*, foreseeing that he was going to reap a rich harvest of souls, opened a formidable battery on him before he set out, and kept it up all the time of his stay in the town. He set out on foot at daybreak, and as he walked along, saying his Rosary, the atmosphere grew dark, and full of sinister flashes and flames of fire; the bushes on either side of the road were on fire, and horrible noises resounded in the air. This was only the prelude to the persecution that he was to undergo during the mission. All night long the devil dragged his bed round the room; next morning on entering the church at daybreak, the Curé of Ars found a crowd of penitents waiting for him; he had

no sooner sat down in the confessional than he felt himself seized and shaken and buffeted, as if he were tossed about by furious waves. Far from being disheartened by this ruffianly violence, the servant of God inwardly rejoiced at it; for it was a sign to him that many sinners were about to be converted. He was, in truth, consoled by witnessing wonderful triumphs of divine grace in a multitude of souls.

The friend and biographer of M. Vianney, the Abbé Monnin, while staying at the presbytery during a mission which inaugurated the Forty Hours' Adoration at Ars, was, early one morning, on leaving his room, met by a smell of burning that almost suffocated him. He hurried out, crossed the square to the church, said Mass, heard confessions until seven o'clock, and then went back to the presbytery, where he found a crowd gathered, and great confusion prevailing. He fancied some accident had happened, but on approaching the crowd he saw they were laughing and joking. "What is the matter?" he inquired.— "What! don't you know that the devils set fire to M. le Curé's bed last night? Look and see!"—"I looked," continues the biographer, "and through the door I saw the men carrying

out the charred remains of furniture. I went in and hurried up to the Curé's room, where everything showed traces of a recent fire. The bed, the curtains, a few pictures on the walls, and some poor paintings on glass that the Curé was very fond of, and had refused to sell because he meant to leave them as a legacy to the missionaries,—all were consumed. The fire only stopped before the shrine of St. Philomena.... And it is a most remarkable, in a sense a miraculous fact, that the fire did not communicate itself from the thick serge curtain to the flooring, which was so old and smoked that it ought to have blazed up like straw."

The Curé himself passed through the men who were carrying away the burnt rubbish, but he took no more notice of the affair than if they had been digging on the road. Abbé Monnin went into the sacristy after him, and found him signing pictures for his orphans. Suddenly the Curé, holding the pen suspended, looked up at him, and, fixing one of his deep, sweet glances on him, said: "I had been asking this grace for a long time of Our Lord, and He has at last heard me. I think I am now the poorest man in the parish; for every

other man has a bed, and I, thank God, have no longer one." Then he went on cheerfully signing the pictures that were being handed in to him.

Later in the day Abbé Monnin spoke to him about the fire, and asked him if he really thought it was the work of the demon. He replied emphatically, but quite coolly: "Oh, my friend, the thing is very plain! As he could not burn the man, he gave himself the pleasure of burning his bed. He is in a rage. That is a good sign: we are going to get money and sinners." It was on this occasion that He remarked: "Nothing makes the devil so angry as when he sees this same money that he uses for corrupting and losing souls turned by us into the means of saving them." It happened as he foretold. A great concourse of penitents came to Ars from all parts of the country during the next few days, and alms poured in abundantly for the mission work. The Curé was heard to say on this occasion also that few things were more intolerable to the demons than the Forty Hours' Adoration, because of the torrents of grace that flowed out on sinners from the devotion.

It was often asked of those who were wit-



nesses of the persecution which the servant of God suffered from the evil spirits, whether Satan ever appeared to him in a visible form. He himself related that he one morning saw a monstrous black dog, with flaming eyes and hair standing up like bristles, tearing the earth off the grave of a man who had died without confession. He said that this sight frightened him terribly.

He confessed to another priest that evil spirits used to fill his room in the form of bats, and in such quantities that the walls were black with them. He had a horror of these creatures, but he was not afraid of them. What was more repugnant to him than bats were rats; the evil spirits sometimes took the form of these vermin, and used to run over his face when he was in bed, hissing hideously. When those who heard the noises with which the demons made night terrible in the presbytery asked the servant of God if he was not in mortal fear of these awful tormentors, who howled like wolves at his door, or shrieked and barked like night-birds and dogs, he would shake his head, and answer with a smile: "They can not do us any real harm; we can laugh at them. While God keeps us

we are in no danger: nothing can hurt us. He is more powerful than the *grappin*."

And yet he was naturally timid, and from the extreme sensitiveness of his nerves, increased by his austerities, he was more liable than others to become the prey of nervous terrors. But his soul dwelt in a region above the reach of natural fears; if it had not been so, these extraordinary trials must have unhinged his mind. God had great designs on the humble priest, and in order to perfect his holiness He permitted him to be tempted beyond what ordinarily holy souls could have borne. These trials lasted over thirty years. It was, in fact, only in the last year of his life that the Curé of Ars was delivered from them, and then only partially.

Yet all through these years he was the guide and comforter of others through every form of trial that souls can experience, and the chief feature of his direction was a power of consolation that seemed to take the sufferers into an atmosphere beyond this world. The anguish of despair, which for such a lengthened period he suffered without intermission, never betrayed itself in his countenance or manner toward those around him. While the demons

made him see hell open under his feet, and kept hissing into his ear, "Your place is ready there! We are waiting to carry you off!" the servant of God was able to pour out floods of consolation on souls struggling under temptation, broken with sorrow, or exasperated by the battle of life; they invariably came away consoled and fortified, and saying within themselves, "How happy must be this man of God, who breathes the very peace of heaven into our souls!" Yes, it was truly the peace of heaven, the peace that passeth understanding, the peace that comes to those who have watched with Jesus through His agony in Gethsemane, and drunk of His chalice, and climbed up to Calvary in His footsteps.

## X.

## HE IS PERSECUTED BY EVIL TONGUES.

BUT the bitterest of all trials was still in store for the Curé of Ars. If we had not the history of all the saints to confirm the fact, it would be almost impossible to believe that a priest like Abbé Vianney—so austere, so humble, so surrounded by the veneration of all who were witnesses of his extraordinary holiness—could fall a victim to hatred and calumny. But he was to pass through this supreme ordeal which God reserves for the final purification of His servants. There is always a certain class of human beings who, being possessed by that distinctively demoniacal characteristic, the deadly sin of envy, are maddened by the sight of whatever things are high and pure and lovely and of good report in others, and who seek to pull down and blacken all who are above them. Unfortunately, this vile and devilish sin is not confined to evil-doers—to men and women who lead bad lives, and whose wickedness might naturally feel rebuked and shamed by the white purity of God's servants;



it finds a place sometimes in souls that are honestly virtuous and full of zeal. These were the persons whom God permitted to be the instruments of the Curé of Ars' trial in order for his greater perfection.

A number of worthy priests were blinded by the devil to such a degree that they imagined M. Vianney was an impostor. When they saw their flocks filled with admiration of his holiness, and their penitents going to seek his direction, they were fired with jealousy, and became a prey to its wicked delusions. When it was reported by trustworthy witnesses that the demons made terrific noises round the holy man's confessional the moment notable sinners entered it, and that while absolution was being pronounced upon them the noise of heavy chains falling, as if suddenly struck off, became audible,—when marvels of this kind were repeated to priests who had failed to draw the same great sinners to the Sacrament of Penance, they went about proclaiming M. Vianney a fanatic and a dupe of the evil spirits.

Another class of persons who swelled false testimonies were well-meaning but flighty and excitable women of the world. These ladies besieged the Curé of Ars for advice in their,

often imaginary, trials and temptations. The servant of God had, perhaps, better have dismissed them with the short attention they deserved, but in his charity he tried to inspire them with the love of the cross, and spoke to them in a language they did not understand; they repeated his words, generally distorting and exaggerating them, and gave scandal by the contrast which this profession of mysticism made with the vanity and sinful frivolity of their lives.

Good priests wrote to M. Vianney in insolent and abusive terms. "A man who knows so little theology as you ought never to sit in the confessional!" was the opening sentence of one of these letters. And the Curé of Ars, who was forced to leave unanswered hundreds of letters full of reverent entreaty, found time to answer this rude missive, and to thank the writer. "Oh, how I ought to love you, my dear and much respected brother!" he exclaims; "you are one of the few who know me thoroughly. Help me, therefore, to obtain the favor I have been so long seeking—namely, to be replaced in my position here, which I am indeed unworthy to occupy on account of my ignorance; and that I may

be free to withdraw into a corner and weep over my sins."

His detractors were not satisfied with insulting and accusing him directly: they worked against him with his bishop, and left nothing undone to induce the latter to dismiss him from Ars. The onset was so fierce at one time that the Curé afterward said: "I expected from one day to another to be put to the door with blows and kicks, and probably to end my days in prison." Happily the bishop was a wise, enlightened and holy man, and soon saw through the tempest raised against his saintly priest. He met his clergy one day at a large assembly, and said: "Gentlemen, I wish you were all afflicted with the same madness to which you say the Curé of Ars is a victim; it would in no way detract from your wisdom. He is a saint,—yes, gentlemen, a saint, whom we should all of us admire and take for our model."

But this protection and testimony, if they curbed the folly and inconsiderate malice of his brethren, did not arrest the effect of their example on the world, or silence evil tongues; these kept on stinging and stabbing him. He felt it all keenly, for his nature was sen-

sitive and his heart tender as a woman's; but he never uttered a word of complaint, and never would suffer a word against the people who were slandering him. Once a friend exclaimed to him, indignantly: "Such calumnies could only be invented by the most perverted of men!" But the holy man answered gently: "Oh, no, they are not perverted; they are not wicked at all; it is simply that they found me out and know me better than others!" But when his friend retorted, "M. le Curé, how could they reproach you with having led a bad life?" the servant of God replied with a sigh: "Alas! my life has always been bad. I led in those days the kind of life I am leading now. I was always good for nothing." And so it was all through the trial: to unreasonable hate and devilish rancor he opposed the meekness and charity of an angel.

In after years a brother priest, who had been witness of the persecution he had undergone, asked M. Vianney if it had not troubled the peace of his soul. "What!" cried the servant of God, while a heavenly smile shone upon his face, "the cross trouble the peace of my soul! Why, it is the cross that gives peace to the world! It is the cross that must



bring it into our hearts. All our misery comes from our not loving it. It is the fear of the cross that makes the cross. A cross borne with simplicity, without the revolt of self-love which exaggerates every pang, is no longer a cross. We pity ourselves for suffering! We ought rather to pity ourselves for not suffering, since it is suffering that makes us like unto Our Lord. I don't understand how a Christian does not love the cross, or how he flies from it. To fly from it is to fly from Him who was fastened to it and died upon it for love of us."

The Curé of Ars was spared, it is true, in this crisis that trial which adds such unutterable anguish to every other pain: he was not deprived of the sense of divine consolation; he was never compelled to cry out upon the cross, "My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" Another person, in alluding to this time of trial, asked him if he remembered having ever been so unhappy under any other affliction. He replied: "I was not unhappy under it at all. I was never so happy in my life. God used to grant me everything I asked of Him then." He was never heard to say anything further on the subject, but it

is a fact that during the eight years that slander and hate were let loose upon him the conversions and extraordinary spiritual graces obtained at Ars increased beyond all calculation. His great gift of miracles dates from this period, as if God took pleasure in glorifying His servant in proportion as the world and the demons attacked and reviled him.

Little by little God's testimony prevailed. Numbers who came to Ars out of mere curiosity, or full of prejudice and malice against M. Vianney, were converted the moment they beheld him. The angelic sweetness of his countenance and childlike gentleness of his manner, the melody of his feeble voice, wrought upon them like a holy spell—disarmed every prejudice, refuted false witnesses, and won every heart. Priests, especially, fell conquests to the holy magnetism of his mild blue eyes; and many a one who had travelled to Ars for the purpose of upbraiding him fell down at his feet with the rude word unspoken and asked for his blessing. It was a terrible ordeal, through which his heroic love of the cross bore him safely, and out of which he came strengthened in virtue and nearer to his Lord than ever.

## XI.

## HIS PHYSICAL SUFFERINGS.

THE physical life of the Curé of Ars was to many a greater miracle than any he ever performed; and assuredly nothing short of a supernatural power could have sustained his frail body and infirm health under the weight of work and fatigue that he endured. The doctor who attended him in his many illnesses used to say, "I am in no fear about his health; it depends on One above me. That One can do what I can't do. At the moment that he seems about to escape from us he rallies, and, as if by enchantment, his strength returns." In the autumn of 1842 the holy man was attacked with inflammation of the lungs; those near him were seriously alarmed, when their fears were almost instantaneously dispelled by one of those sudden rallies. At night he seemed entering on his agony, and in the morning he was as well as ever, up and doing as if nothing had happened.

Early in the spring of the following year he had an illness which lasted longer. The

crowd of pilgrims was greater than usual, and he was breaking down under the load of work to be done; the multitude of penitents that surrounded his confessional all through the day and night did not leave him a moment for rest. One evening he ascended the pulpit and began his usual exhortation to the people, when his strength failed him; he had to stop, and, after a second effort, was obliged to give it up. Then he tried to say evening prayers, but he was not equal even to this; his voice faltered and he broke down completely. He was assisted from the pulpit and allowed to go home. The moment he lay down in bed the gravest symptoms appeared, and soon there was every reason to believe that the message had come—that the servant of God was going home. The doctor said there was nothing to be done. "Only God can save him!" was his despairing exclamation.

The people were inconsolable. The little church where his presence had for so many years drawn saints and sinners from every part of the world, presented one of those touching spectacles common in the ages of faith, but very rare in our day. The pastor's flock filled it late and early. Tapers were kept



burning at the altars of Our Lady and St. John, and above all of St. Philomena, the dear patroness of the dying saint,—she who had worked so many miracles at his desire. The crowd round the presbytery was so persistent and so eager that it became necessary to place a guard at the gate to prevent the people from invading the house. They kept calling out to their Curé to let them look upon him once more, to give them one more blessing,—and were only calmed when one near him bade them kneel down and receive the benediction he was about to invoke upon them from his bed of pain.

Parish priests came from distant towns; religious of many communities, rich men and beggars, and sinners and holy men,—all came to Ars for news of “the dying saint,”—this same saint whom a little time before many of them were bespattering with the vilest calumnies. The silence of grief and consternation hung over the village.

Three physicians of repute were called in to consult with the doctor in attendance. They could give no reasonable hope that the exhausted system could hold out against the complication of maladies, chronic and acute, from which

the patient was suffering; it was therefore decided that he must receive Extreme Unction. As if to give greater solemnity to the sacred rite, seven ecclesiastics, who had come to get tidings of their brother priest, were present, and counted it a high privilege to assist at the death of a saint, as they considered it. In order to spare the people the poignant emotion of knowing that their beloved pastor was being administered, those around him agreed that the bell had better not be tolled. But the Curé overheard their whispered conversation and, finding strength to make his voice heard, said: "Go and ring the bell. Must not the parishioners pray for their pastor?" The passing-bell had no sooner begun its melancholy message than the entire village hurried to the presbytery and the church; all who could follow the Blessed Sacrament from the altar to the house did so; the staircase was crowded, and the courtyard and the place without: and all were in tears.

The last Sacraments were administered to the servant of God, who received them with his usual simplicity and fervor. When he had made his thanksgiving he whispered a request to one of his brethren to say Mass for him next

morning at the altar of St. Philomena. When this became known there was a general reaction toward hope. His extraordinary faith in the power of the Saint and the innumerable miraculous favors he had obtained through her intercession were so well known to all the people that they came in crowds to assist at the Holy Sacrifice, convinced that she would obtain the life of their pastor. The friend who watched night and day by his bedside gives the following account of what passed meantime in the dying man's room:

"Before the Holy Sacrifice began M. le Curé appeared to me like a man who was frightened. I noticed something altogether extraordinary about him—a great anxiety, an unusual disturbance. I observed his every movement with renewed attention. I thought the fatal moment had come, and that he was going to breathe his last sigh. But as soon as the priest ascended the altar he grew suddenly calmer. He now looked like a man who beheld something pleasant and comforting. Mass was hardly over when he cried out: 'My friend, a wonderful change has taken place in me. *I am cured!*' My joy was great at these words. I was convinced that the Curé had had a vision; I had

heard him murmur several times the name of his sweet patroness, which led me to believe that St. Philomena had appeared to him. But I did not dare put a question to him."

Whatever the secret between him and St. Philomena may have been, the Curé of Ars guarded it faithfully. What he could not conceal was the fact that from that moment all dangerous symptoms left him, and he was suddenly convalescent. His docility to the four doctors who were witnesses of his cure was the admiration of everybody. He knew how vain their human efforts had been, and yet he continued to obey their injunctions as if they had been his ecclesiastical superiors. Sometimes, indeed, he tried to evade certain prescriptions that were antagonistic to his austere habit, as when he desired Catherine to throw away the chicken broth that she was ordered to make for him; but when his confessor scolded him for this infraction of discipline, and bade him take the broth, he obeyed like a chidden child. His playful gayety was a source of wonder and delight to everybody. One day, seeing the faculty standing round his bed in the persons of his four physicians, he laughed in his childlike way, and, looking



from one to the other, said: "I am fighting a hard battle!"—"Against whom, M. le Curé?"—"Against four doctors. If a fifth comes in I am a dead man!"

This illness was a time of great spiritual joy to the servant of God. He used to speak with a kind of innocent glee of the piety and charity of his flock throughout. "Oh! how it used to stir my heart," he said, "when I saw the gray heads of the parish come in and bow down by my bedside to get my blessing!"

He accepted the respite from death with a deep sense of relief and thanksgiving. He was resigned to die, but his holy fear of God, his sense of his own sinfulness and the awful purity of God, made him tremble at the prospect of the judgment. He was heard frequently murmuring under his breath, "No, no, my God! Not yet! I am not ready to appear before Thy awful tribunal." He was impatient to regain strength to walk to the church and offer up his thanks to the Divine Mercy for his recovery. As soon as it was possible he had himself assisted, almost carried, to the altar of St. Philomena, and there, with tears of gratitude streaming from his eyes, he thanked his dear protectress for having obtained for

him yet a little while to do penance for his sins and serve his Lord. But the longing of his soul from this forth was to serve Him in solitude. The burden of the apostolate seemed to weigh him down to the earth. He was convinced that his unworthiness made a barrier against the graces that God wanted to pour out on the souls he had charge of, and that he was endangering his own salvation by hindering their sanctification.

Those who were present the first time the Curé of Ars sat in the sanctuary after his illness, and addressed his flock, declared the effect was like nothing else they had ever experienced. His voice was so weak as to be hardly audible; his poor, emaciated frame could hardly sustain itself; but his limpid blue eyes had a flame in them that set all hearts aglow, and his voice pierced them like a sword. He resembled a soul who had been to the world beyond, and come back to earth, panting, homesick, and yearning to be set free,—just holding on to life through humility and obedience. And, in truth, he longed more and more to escape from the crowd, and indulge in solitary communion with God.

## XII.

## HIS FLIGHT TO DARDILLY.

It was at this period that he was heard often to regret the little valley of Chante-Merle, where as a child he used to take his father's three sheep to graze, and where he had prayed so happily, undisturbed before his Madonna. "If I could go and end my poor life there, how good it would be!" he sometimes murmured. Those who were close to him saw that this thought was absorbing him more and more; and when he began to threaten, half playfully, that he would "run away one of these days," they felt there was more earnest than jest in the words. It was, therefore, more a grief than a surprise to them when it became known one morning that M. Vianney had stolen away in the nighttime,—yes, stolen himself away like a thief. Near two o'clock a light was seen in his bedroom window; he crept cautiously down stairs and went out by the backdoor. A number of people who were standing in the court outside the church, seeing this, hurried after him, crying out to him to bless some

rosaries and medals; but he walked on quickly, paying no heed to them. They took for granted that he was going on a sick call, and did not follow him, but went back to the church. It was only when the hours went by and it was near five o'clock, and he did not appear in the confessional, that the alarm spread; it soon became general, and the village woke to the fact that their pastor had fled.

He had quietly gone off to the old home at Dardilly, where his brother still lived. The joy of the family on beholding him was great. He shared it in his gentle way, and took a childlike pleasure in going to see the old places that were full of the sweet memories of his youth. He went at once to pay his respects to the elders whom he had known, and to such of his contemporaries as were still in the village. This done, he resumed his life of prayer and contemplation and austerity, as if it had not been interrupted, and never left his little room except to go to the church.

The most touching letters reached him from Ars, urging him to return. One of these, from his parishioner M. des Garets, made an impression on him. His old friend implored him not to take any final resolutions without



seeing him. "Rest as long as you feel the need of it," said M. des Garets; "stay quietly with your brother. You are in need of rest; but don't forget your poor parish of Ars." He went on to remind the fugitive of the sorrow his flight would cause to many; the loss he would be to the Providence, where the deserted orphans were weeping over their lost father; he piled up every argument that could move the heart of the servant of God or influence his conscience. This letter affected him greatly. He read it several times, and seemed much perplexed by it.

Another appeal came to him from the village publican. "Ah, Monsieur," wrote that ill-famed functionary. "I entreat you not to abandon us! You know that I always told you, and I now repeat it from the bottom of my heart—"If there is anything in my business that you disapprove of, I submit myself entirely to your will." Here was a testimony not to be doubted. In fact, there was a concert of supplications from high and low, all repeating the same refrain—"Come back to us!"

The Curé, moreover, was soon disabused of the idea that to escape from Ars was to escape from the crowd: the crowd had followed him

to Dardilly. In a few days the village was like a fair. Coaches and vehicles of all kinds came laden from Lyons with travellers eager to see the man of God, whose fame as a saint was great in the rich manufacturing city. He had to get faculties to hear the confessions of numbers who came to him from Ars, where they had begun their accusations.

After a week of this involuntary mission work, M. Vianney made up his mind to leave Dardilly. He knew not where to turn his steps, but he could not remain here. He therefore set out with Abbé Raymond, his dear friend, trusting to Providence to guide him to the right place. They travelled in a comfortless cart, the jolting of which nearly broke M. Vianney to pieces. On the road they came to a church, where they stopped to say their Office. It was empty when they went in, and when they were coming out it was full to overflowing. No one was aware how it became known that the Curé of Ars was there, but somehow it had got wind, and the people were resolved he should not go away without speaking to them and giving them a blessing. He did as they desired, addressing them in his usual simple but inspired language, and leaving them con-

vinced that all they had heard of his sanctity was short of the reality.

The two travellers continued their road till they reached Beaumont, where they passed the night. Next morning they both said Mass in an ancient sanctuary of Our Lady, which is held in veneration by the faithful. The Curé of Ars remained a long time absorbed in his thanksgiving. At last he lifted his head, which had been bowed upon his breast, and, bending toward Abbé Raymond, who was kneeling beside him, he whispered, "*Let us go back to Ars.*"

Abbé Raymond made a sign of acquiescence, rose and went out of the church, and, without asking a question or venturing a remark, quietly accompanied the Curé back to his parish. The people who had been besieging Our Lady and St. Philomena, were wild with delight when they beheld him restored to them. Laborers hurried from the fields, women deserted the washtubs, children ran from their play, to welcome him; and there was joy in the land as of the just rejoicing at the return of the prodigal.

## XIII.

## PILGRIMAGES TO ARS.

MODERN times have seen nothing to compare with the pilgrimages of Ars. Of late years Lourdes has, it is true, presented to the world an equally striking manifestation of the faith of many lands; but the origin of the pilgrimage to the Grotto in the Pyrenees is sufficient to explain its universal popularity: it was the Mother of God herself who bade the nations come there. The "Immaculate Conception" appeared upon the hillside, and bade the little shepherdess go and tell the people to "come and drink of the fountain," promising consolation and healing. But no such divine command had come forth from Ars. The Morning Star had not shone visibly amidst visions and promises to entice the faithful thither. They were drawn there by the holiness, by the saintly life, of a humble parish priest, unknown to the world, illiterate, poor in all that constitutes power in the eyes of men. This is what makes the pilgrimage of Ars so remarkable. Since the days of St. Bernard,



no living saint was so pursued by the admiration and reverence of the world as was M. Vianney. As a rule, the world has waited till the saints were dead before it recognized their sanctity and crowned it with honor: the Curé of Ars was crowned during his lifetime,—crowned with thorns, it is true, for it was positive torture to his humility to see himself thus pursued by the veneration of his fellowmen.

This veneration had, nevertheless, a consoling significance which could not have escaped his discerning spirit: it was a manifestation of faith that triumphantly refuted the pessimism and incredulity of the age. While the schools of Europe were proclaiming the reign of the so-called philosophers and the decay of a worn-out Christianity, *eighty thousand* pilgrims were journeying every year to Ars, simply to honor a man who was the extreme representation of the doctrines of the *worn-out* creed,—that and nothing more. The world, which professes to doubt and to deride, was conquered by the power of this embodiment of the religion of Jesus Christ in a village priest, and hurried from its pleasures and its gains to behold it. The poor came first, as in the days of Christ.

They came, and were healed and enlightened; they went away proclaiming the wonderful works of God. And then the "wise men" followed, coming from the West and the East, to witness the marvels that were being wrought at Ars. Sceptics came and were compelled to believe; sinners long hardened in vice and crime came, and were stricken with compunction, and went away new-born. These spiritual miracles were more frequent than any others. The great thaumaturgus was the confessor.

A pilgrim relates how one bitter cold night, after the Curé had retired to rest, there was heard a loud knocking at the presbytery door, and on his calling out from his window to know who was there, a voice answered, "Come down; I want to speak to you, Curé!" The holy man, who had a mortal fear of midnight robbers, hesitated; for the speaker was a powerful fellow, in the garb of a carter, and with a rough voice. The visitor called out a second time, "Come down, I tell you, Curé! I want to confess, and I am in a hurry." This was putting a pistol to the Curé's throat. He made the Sign of the Cross, and though still trembling with fear, hurried down and entered the church.

The imperious penitent made an excellent confession, and the Curé was so grateful to him that, not content with giving him the mildest penance, he insisted on his carrying off a pair of warm socks as a comfort on his long drive home.

This may be taken as a specimen of the penitents who in the early days besieged the confessional that was one day to be sought out by the holiest and the most learned. It is God's way to begin every great work with the poor and the ignorant; they are the first always to come from afar and follow Him three days fasting, and they are the ones whom He feeds miraculously on the mountain. Later, when they had spread M. Vianney's fame abroad, the great ones came and got their share; men of all races and nationalities crowded to the confessional of the Curé of Ars, until he became a slave to its ministry, a victim always bound and ready to be sacrificed on the altar of souls. St. Philip Neri had such a dread of misspending time that he prayed that he might never have an hour in the day to call his own. Whether the Curé of Ars ever offered up this prayer we know not, but it certainly was granted to him; for he

never had five minutes at his own disposal.

There was nothing in his life more admirable than the patience and equanimity with which he bore this trial. He let his day be devoured by others without ever letting it be seen that he was suffering. He longed for rest as the poor hunted animal longs for it, and he never was granted a moment's rest. Even his nights were not left free: they were invaded by evil spirits, so that he might not enjoy the luxury of an hour's quiet prayer before his body sought the scanty sleep that was necessary for existence. Yet day after day, all the day long, all the year round, the strangers who were struggling for his attention found him invariably as calm, as collected, as ready to give his whole mind to them, as if he had no other interests in the world; never a cloud on his brow, never a short word,—nothing that could suggest weariness of mind or body.

The only time of respite he had to look forward to through the year was the pastoral retreat that he used to attend at Lyons. How he longed for that blessed week to come round! How he steeped his soul in the quiet and the silence of it! But even this was to be taken from him. So early as the year 1835 the



bishop, on seeing him arrive, eager, cheery, happy as a school-boy out for a holiday, met him with the exclamation, "M. le Curé, you are in no want of a retreat, and there are multitudes of souls in want of you at Ars. Go back to your parish." And the jaded laborer, without a word, without a sign of regret, went back. He never made a retreat again after this.

The amount of work put upon him grew with every year. The pilgrimage increased to such an extent that the Bishop was obliged to send him help, though he thought it unnecessary to give him a day's rest. A community of missionary priests were sent to Ars to assist in ministering to the pilgrims, and to share the work that was overwhelming M. Vianney. But, however zealous and devoted these auxiliaries were, they could not prevent the pastor's being the victim of his own sublime gifts and marvellous vocation. Their work was, nevertheless, blessed in an extraordinary degree, and the harvest of souls which they reaped was so rich that they could only explain it as being an extension of M. Vianney's work,—the result of his prayers, and a permitted participation in the power exercised by his sanctity

on all who came to Ars for the purpose of seeking his help.

Nothing could adequately describe what the life of the Curé of Ars was amidst this great concourse of penitents, but we gather some idea of it from notes taken on the spot by a gentleman who went to Ars in order to seek his advice concerning some matter of vital importance. It was in 1857. On arriving at the village, the pilgrim was told that M. le Curé was in the church. He walked straight there, intending to make his confession at once, and expecting to find the Curé quietly saying his breviary, or perhaps making his meditation before the Blessed Sacrament. Instead of this he found the church crowded. Men were gathered round the sanctuary, women filled the nave; some were reading, some saying the Rosary, but all wore an air of profound recollection.

"Never," says the pilgrim, "did the antechamber of king or minister present such an aspect of grandeur and majesty; I felt at once all the dignity of that lowly minister of the sovereign King of heaven and earth, whose sanctity gave him such power and drew so many souls to his feet. Meantime I looked

around for him, and could not see him. Some one pointed to the sacristy, and told me that he was confessing men there; he was at present hearing the confession of those who had come the day before. It was now five o'clock in the afternoon. Clearly, I had no chance of seeing the Curé that day, being at the extreme end of the long chain that began at the sacristy door. But I did not complain.... The door opened and closed as the penitents or seekers of advice followed one another into the tribunal of the holy priest. They were recollected, anxious, their expression full of care, when they passed in; when they came out they were calm, serene, joyous.

"Two hours passed quickly. I forgot to reckon time. The scene under one's eyes so filled the soul with thoughts of things divine and eternal that one forgot everything else. Night fell. It was now eight o'clock. The church, instead of growing empty, became more crowded. I was told it was the hour of evening prayer, and that all the villagers came to join in it. M. Vianney came out from the sacristy and ascended the pulpit. He wore his surplice, which, indeed, he never took off. His whole exterior expressed his

extraordinary sanctity. His face, his whole person, was thin to emaciation, attesting the sublime and awful work of mortification and asceticism. . . . The frail and bent figure seemed grand and majestic. He walked with his head bowed and his lids drooping; his long hair fell about his neck, and made the effect of a glory round his head. I felt a thrill go through me as he passed close to me and I touched the hem of his garment. When he entered the pulpit every one knelt down, and he began night prayers in so feeble a voice that nothing reached me but a faint murmur. . . .

“When the prayers were over he came down from the pulpit and went into his house, passing between two hedges of people, who all knelt to receive his blessing. . . . I was loath to depart without having spoken to him. I inquired what one could do in order to get a word with him. A man who was making the church tidy, and whom I took for the sacristan, told me that if I would come at four o'clock in the morning I should be able to see him, and get away in the afternoon. I resolved to be there at four. Meantime the people were going home; the peasants from



the neighborhood were returning to their villages. . . . I went to my hotel.

"The next morning, Friday, September 11, 1857, I was up and dressed at four o'clock, and in the church before daybreak. I expected to find myself the first comer, but I was met by the same surprise as the night before. A large crowd had already arrived, and, to my grievous disappointment, I could only get a place a long way off from that blessed door which gave access to the Curé, and which I was destined, like Moses, to see from afar, without entering in. 'How long have you been here?' I asked of my neighbors.—'Since two o'clock this morning.'—'And when did the Curé come?'—'At midnight.'—'Where is he now?'—'Yonder, in the confessional behind the choir. He is confessing women now. This is his usual occupation on Friday morning. He will only receive men after Mass.'—'Then what are all those men that I see there doing?'—'They are keeping their places. They were waiting when the Curé came.' . . . I was astounded. I knew that men are capable of prodigious patience when their interests or their pleasures are at stake; that they will 'make tail' for hours to get a place in the

theatre; I had known of their spending days and nights waiting in the Rue Quincampoix to secure shares in the Mississippi. I had never before seen men make the same sacrifice of time and rest for the sake of a purely spiritual gain; and the spectacle, which reminded me of some scene from the Gospel, went to my heart and moved me to tears. . . .

"All the same I was vexed with the sacristan for not having warned me that I should pass the night at the door of the church, and so escape being relegated to the last place. I looked awry at him as he came and went arranging the chairs, etc. There was a *alm* dignity about him, however, that was remarkable. Upon inquiry I learned that he was a man of the world, who, having been cured and converted by the Curé of Ars, had devoted himself, out of gratitude, to the laborious and thankless task that I saw him performing so assiduously. He kept order in the church while the Curé was confessing; and, as the Curé often confessed twenty hours out of the twenty-four, this was no trifle. . . .

"At six o'clock the curate came to say Mass. At seven, after sitting from midnight, the Curé came out of the confessional, with the calm,

rested air that was habitual to him, and passed into the sacristy to prepare for Mass. I had contrived to slip into the sacristy while the curate was there. 'Stay quietly here,' he said to me; 'perhaps the Curé may consent to hear you before he goes up to the altar.' But the Curé, who sees by a glance the state of souls and their necessities, did not feel moved to satisfy my impatience. All that I gained by the attempt was to feel his sweet and piercing gaze fixed on me for a moment, and to see him getting ready to say Mass. . . . I followed him to the altar of St. Philomena, for whom he has a special veneration. It is here that he always says his Mass; it is here that he obtains numbers of miracles. . . .

"His Mass over, I fancied he might be approached, but I was again mistaken. The church was overflowing with people, and the crowd separated me from him while he was going to the sacristy. . . . He reappeared in his surplice on the steps of the choir, and the multitude of pilgrims pressed toward him, with quantities of beads and medals to be blessed, with children on whom he was to lay his hands. When this was done he went into the little sacristy at the right side of the church, where

he received, one by one, ladies who had come from a distance to consult him. At the end of about an hour he came out again, and began the confessions of the men. . . . I was near losing patience, but a moment's reflection made me ashamed of myself.

"It was nearly nine o'clock. The same scene was continued at the door of the sacristy, which had again become inaccessible to me. Everyone took his place and waited his turn. Sometimes the Curé himself pointed out the person he wished to admit, and no one dreamed of complaining of this. That the great infirmities should be healed first seemed fair to all. Now and then penitents who had just been absolved went up to the altar, and the curate came and gave them Holy Communion.

"This sublime drama of charity had lasted ten hours. The chief actor in it had not for one moment slackened nor suspended his activity. There he was, always on the stage, always indefatigable. I, who had only arrived four hours after him,—I was already feeling overcome by fatigue and want of food. Before giving up, however, I resolved to make one more attack on the impregnable sacristy. With the help of the obliging auxiliary of the saint



I contrived to place myself opposite the door, so that when the Curé opened it to admit a newcomer he saw me straight before him; he seemed to recognize me, and signed to me to come in. We both remained standing. Anxious not to take up unnecessarily one moment of the precious time of the holy man, I put briefly and rapidly two questions I had prepared. He answered me at once, emphatically, without seeming to reflect,—without the least hesitation, but also without the least hurry; and his replies were just what was most sensible, wise, and also most easily and usefully put in practice. Most men are obliged to think, to pause, to weigh a plan, before deciding the best course to be taken. The Curé of Ars improvised wisdom. I was amazed to see how calm, how ready his presence of mind was under such conditions. Since midnight he had been besieged without respite; he gave himself no breathing space; he had had to answer several hundred persons. While I spoke to him a man was kneeling at the *prie-dieu* waiting to confess; a great multitude of others were crowding round the door like the rising tide of the sea. And the holy priest was there amidst it all, giving himself to each one, without impatience, without

apparent fatigue, his heart always open, his mind always ready, his frail body in constant activity. Assuredly this was not human, this was not natural. . . .

“After his brief answers and a few words exchanged,—the whole not lasting more than five minutes,—I bowed my head; he blessed me; I kissed his hand and withdrew, full of joy, of strength, and of veneration. I was glad also to be free. I took advantage of it to enjoy the fresh air and walk through the village, which I had not had time to see. In about half an hour I hastened back to the church to assist at what was called M. le Curé’s catechism. It was an instruction that he delivered every day before noon, after the fatigue and hard work of those terrible sittings. The church was now so full that I could scarcely find standing room near the choir. The Curé came out and sat down on a chair placed against the high altar, and the homily began. The holy man’s eloquence was certainly not in his language. Though very near him, I could hardly hear what he said; for besides the extreme feebleness of his voice, the total loss of his teeth made his speech utterly unintelligible. But he was eloquent by his countenance, by

his action,—above all, by the authority of his life and the ascendancy of his works. And what power he had over his audience! This was the closing scene and the most beautiful one. The crowd had gathered round him; at his feet, on the altar steps, on the floor of the choir, people of all ages and conditions were pressing up to him, all absorbed in breathless attention, their necks strained, their eyes fixed on him. For if you could not hear him you saw him, and this was enough: his whole person spoke distinctly. He shuddered with horror when he spoke of sin; he shed tears in alluding to the offence against God; he was like one rapt in ecstasy when he dwelt on divine love; he grew pale and red by turns. . . . I repeat: you heard very little, but you felt everything. . . . Like St. John, he kept repeating, ‘My children!’ And the people listened as to a father. . . .

“Midday struck as the Curé ceased speaking and returned to the presbytery, to seek in mortification and prayer the strength to take up again, two or three hours later, his life of immolation and sacrifice. As for me, I left the village of Ars carrying with me as a treasure the blessing of the Abbé Vianney, and the

indelible remembrance of the wonders of charity and holiness that I had witnessed. I saw no special miracle but I beheld the miracle of his daily life,—that life of which each day resembled exactly the one it had been given me to contemplate.”

If the writer had been permitted to follow M. Vianney into the presbytery, he would have witnessed another phase of his miraculous existence, as marvellous in its way as any that he has chronicled. He would have seen the little oak table of the Curé's room covered with letters from all parts of the world, and he would have seen him get through this voluminous correspondence while he ate what he called his dinner,—a meal that consisted of a few cold potatoes, a piece of bread and a glass of water. The moment he opened a letter he saw whether it was worth reading or not. Those that contained money for Masses he handed to his curate; those that were confidential he read in silence and at once tore up; those that began with compliments and flattering formulas—“The fame of your sanctity,”—“The gift of miracles which your great holiness,” etc.,—were immediately torn up, and thrown into the grate with a gesture of impatience.



The Curé had nearly always dispatched the morning's correspondence by the time he had eaten his cold potatoes; any letters that were not opened during that interval ran a great risk of never being opened.

These letters that poured in on him were from people of all ranks, characters, and countries: they formed a concert of souls crying out for help and light in every sorrow or difficulty that life in its endless complications presents. Amongst these petitioners were saints and sinners, bishops and politicians, convicts and Carmelites, soldiers and monks, actors and journalists; wives, mothers, young girls aspiring to devote their innocent souls to God; others who had fallen into sin and were longing to rise up and lead penitent lives. There was not a form or degree of human misery or pain that did not find a voice in the correspondence that awaited the tired confessor on that little table after his long night and morning in the church.

## XIV.

## HIS MIRACLES.

WHAT the holy man suffered from mere physical exhaustion can hardly be conceived. We get some idea of it from the testimony of a pilgrim, who, after practising the necessary amount of patience, got near to the door of the Curé's confessional. "As I knelt," he says, "I heard a sound, a kind of sob, that I can not describe. Was it a cry of pain? Every ten minutes or so the same sound was repeated. It was fatigue that forced it from the panting breast of the Curé of Ars."

No miracle, we repeat it, so manifested the supernatural gifts of the servant of God as this power of his spirit to sustain his fainting, trembling body—his "poor carcass," as he aptly enough called it,—under the tremendous load of his daily labor. And yet how innumerable were the other miracles that he worked daily and almost unconsciously! He strove to hide them as if they were evil deeds that would bring disgrace upon him, and was often heard reproaching St. Philomena for covering him

with confusion by working her cures through his hands and in his presence instead of waiting till he was out of the way. He seemed to shrink from using the gift of healing that had been given him, and would gladly have confined it to the cure of souls, had this been possible.

His devoted servant, Catherine Lassagne, tells us how he used to naïvely upbraid his "dear little Saint" with occupying herself so much with the healing of bodies, when she ought to be thinking of souls that stood so much more in need of being healed. But the dear little Saint paid no attention to these complaints. She continued to give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, to restore health to bodies stricken with mortal diseases, to cause ulcers and cancers to disappear instantaneously, and to "cover with confusion" the humble priest who was the instrument of these wonders worked through her intercession.

Sometimes God humored the humility of His servant by deferring the miracle until the Curé was out of sight. Once, for instance, a fiddler, who played at all the village dances for miles around, came to beg the cure of his lame child. The Curé persuaded him to go to confession, extracted a promise from him to mend his

life, and sent him away with a blessing. The man, on returning home, took his fiddle and threw it into the fire; upon seeing which his wife uttered a cry of dismay, and simultaneously came a cry of joy from the lame child, who began to leap about the room, exclaiming, "I am cured! I am cured!" The Curé loved to tell of this miracle, the credit of which he fancied could in no way be reflected on himself. He would often refuse to pray for, or lay hands on the sick, but would give them a medal of St. Philomena, and desire them to make a novena to her; and when at the end of it the miracle was granted, he would express delight and amazement, as if his prayers had nothing to do with it,—as if he had never expected it.

Now and then, when his tender heart was stirred by the sight of some painful infirmity, he would bless and touch the sufferer "on the sly," and then look innocently surprised when the miracle was performed. A poor woman came from a distant village, carrying on her back a boy eight years old, who had been paralyzed from his birth. She waited in the church all day without being able to get near enough to the Curé to speak to him;



but whenever he came within sight of her she held out the child to him with an expression of supplication so intense that all the people were filled with pity for her. But the Curé did not even glance toward her. When he went into the confessional he saw her standing there with her arms outstretched, but he passed on without raising his eyes; when he came out there she was, still holding up the child in mute appeal; but the Curé took no notice. At last, as he was going into the sacristy, he raised his hand and blessed the little paralytic, but without touching him or even looking at him.

Worn out with fatigue, and sick at heart with disappointment, the poor woman went away to spend the night in a miserable lodging. Suddenly, as she was undressing the child, he said: "Mother, you must go out early and buy me a pair of *sabots*; for M. le Curé promised me that I should walk to-morrow." Had the saintly man spoken in a whisper to the child unperceived by the mother, or was it the Holy Ghost that had whispered the promise to him, no one could tell; but, obeying the boy's desire, the mother went out at the sound of the first bell and bought the wooden shoes. Scarcely had she put them on his feet when he

sprang up and stood, and began to leap about the room; and before the delighted mother had realized the wonderful change he had escaped from her, and was running to the church, crying out, "I am cured! I am cured!" She followed him, weeping tears of joy; and seeing the curate, she begged him to take her to M. Vianney that she might express to him her gratitude and ask his blessing. But when they approached the holy man with this request they were motioned away with a stern gesture. The Curé began to prepare to say his Mass. The curate waited till it was over, and then courageously returned to the assault. "Monsieur le Curé, you can't refuse to help this poor woman to thank St. Philomena!" he pleaded. M. Vianney, conquered at last, turned toward the mother and the little boy and blessed them, muttering in a tone of childish vexation as he moved away, "St. Philomena might just as well have cured that child at home!"

The miracles that he worked without scruple or timidity were those of the spiritual order,—those by which diseased souls were healed, dead souls raised to life,—those stupendous miracles that send joy to the seventh heavens, and which sometimes we see performed under

our eyes without being the least moved by them. M. Vianney's power for healing and resuscitating souls was the grandest gift that had been bestowed upon him, and he exercised it with a diligence that was equal to his zeal. His love for souls was Christ-like; it was a flame that set on fire all who drew near to it. It would probably be within the truth to say that many thousands of sinners were converted by the mere longing of his soul as his eyes rested on them.

People were constantly converted by the spectacle of the Curé of Ars saying Mass. A virtue came out of his aspect at the altar that smote the hardest hearts, revived dead faith in souls, and sent them away renewed to life. A well-known *savant*, who had lost every trace of faith, was induced by a friend to stop at Ars on his way to a scientific mission. He was highly amused when his friend asked him to come and assist at the Curé's Mass, for he had never "been guilty of that act of superstition" since his First Communion; however, he went. When Mass was over he felt a great load suddenly weighing down his shoulders; his head fell upon his breast, and he could not lift it. The Curé, in passing from the altar, laid

his thin hand upon the bowed head, and desired the gentleman to come into the sacristy. The latter rose at once, and falling on his knees exclaimed, "M. le Curé, I am crushed down by an awful weight on my shoulders!" The holy man smiled, and, "in a voice so sweet that it sounded like nothing human," answered: "When you have confessed the story of your poor life Our Lord will Himself relieve you of your load; for He has said, 'Come to Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.'" The unbeliever made his confession; when he left Ars he was a fervent Christian, and remained so ever after.

M. Vianney worked these spiritual miracles every day in the holy tribunal. Once a young man came to him and made his confession, but without any real contrition for his sins. The servant of God began to dilate on the love of God and the cruelty of wounding His divine Heart by sin, until, overcome by his own fervor, he burst into tears and wept copiously, wiping away the tears quietly with the back of his hand. The penitent, in surprise, asked him why he wept so. "Alas, my son," was the reply, "I weep because you do not weep!" Whereupon the young man, stricken



with heartfelt compunction, bewailed his sins, and received absolution in sentiments of the deepest penitence.

A young man who had been brought up by a Christian mother lost his faith, and was leading such a wild life that his family at last decided to make him enlist, as the only means of cutting short his dissolute career. His mother, who, like another Monica, never ceased weeping and praying for his conversion, was inconsolable; for it seemed to her as if, in sending him off a-soldiering, they were placing him beyond all hope of redemption. She resolved to make a last effort to save him. The young man's sole remaining virtue was love for his mother, and she entreated him before going to join his regiment to come with her to Ars. He burst out laughing at the proposal; but seeing the tears in her eyes he consented, and they set out together. When they reached Ars it was just the hour for the instruction on the catechism. The young man was very reluctant to go to the church; but he yielded again to his mother's wishes, and they went. No sooner did he find himself in the presence of the servant of God than he was "seized with a shuddering," as he described

it; and when those luminous blue eyes singled him out and rested upon him, he felt as if they were piercing him through and through, looking right into the depths of his guilty conscience.

He left the church in a strange inward agitation, and his mother had the greatest difficulty to persuade him to return in the afternoon. She succeeded, however, and they took their places amongst the crowd and waited some time; then the sacristy door opened, and M. Vianney came forward and made a sign to him to advance. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, the young man rose, everybody making way for him, and he passed into the sacristy. The door closed behind him, and some force outside his will made his knees bend under him, and he found himself in the confessional. He could neither move nor speak, but listened in trembling bewilderment to the exhortation of the man of God. It lasted only a few minutes; then the Curé said: "Go and say five *Paters* and *Aves* before the altar of St. Philomena." The unwilling penitent rose at once and did as he was told. As he knelt before the image of the "dear little Saint" his eyes were opened and the hardness of his heart was overcome.

He shed floods of tears; the horror of his life of sin was made clear to him, and he rose thoroughly converted. He remained at Ars to make a retreat, and, after six months' persevering penance, entered a religious community, where he embraced an austere life, and found the hundredfold promised in this world to those who leave all for God's sake.

✓ These miracles worked upon souls by the disciple of Him whose glance falling on the guilty Apostle sent him forth "weeping bitterly," are so numerous that they would fill a little volume by themselves. Learned professors, primed and loaded with the science which is supposed to have replaced Christianity, came to Ars intending to confound the wily priest who was making so many dupes; but it was in every case they who were confounded, and who went away confessing the wonderful works of God and His servant.

Sometimes the supernatural beauty of the Curé's soul was made visible by external signs, and God let it shine before sinners in order to conquer and convert them. One day a hardened libertine came to Ars,—drawn there either by curiosity or some interested motive, for he absolutely refused to listen to

the entreaties of the Curé to think of his soul. The servant of God tried in vain the effect of tears, caresses and warnings: the unfortunate man turned obdurately away, and was leaving the sacristy when, at the door, he looked back to salute the Curé, and suddenly with a cry fell upon his knees and burst into tears. He beheld a glory of light round the head of the venerable priest, and saw his face shining like the face of an angel; and his heart was converted in an instant. Surprised at this extraordinary change, M. Vianney asked him what it meant, and he replied: "I see a circle of lights shining round your head." The holy man was amused at the declaration, but he heard the convert's confession, and spoke to him with burning fervor of the awful nature of sin. "Ah, just cast one glance at Jesus on the Cross," he exclaimed in tears, "and say to yourself: 'This is what it cost my Saviour to repair the injuries that my sins have done to God!—a God who came down on earth to be a victim for me,—a God who suffers, a God who dies, a God who endures every species of torment because He wishes to bear the burden of our crimes.' What a pity it is! God will say to you at the hour of death:



‘Why have you offended Me,—I who loved you so much?’ O my son! to offend God who is so good to us, and to gratify the devil who only wants to hurt us,—what folly! What a pity it is!” His familiar expression, “*Que c’est dommage!*” was irresistible on his lips: above all when it was accompanied by the clasping of his hands, and the beseeching glance of those clear sweet eyes.

## XV.

HIS SYMPATHY WITH THE SORROWFUL—LONG-  
ING FOR QUIET COMMUNING WITH GOD.

It was not alone spiritual poverty—the miseries of the soul—that drew from him those tears and that exclamation of pity. The heart of M. Vianney was always ready to sympathize with human sorrow or pain in whatever form it came before him: his compassion went out spontaneously to every sufferer who came to him for consolation, whether the subject of it was moral or physical tribulation. Sickness, disappointment, blighted affection, reverse of fortune,—he was sorry for it all. Many an aching heart that went to him in despair felt the load of trouble suddenly lightened by the sympathy that expressed itself in his eyes and the tone of his voice: he lessened pain by sheer force of participation.

But it was in the great and deep sorrows of life that the Curé's power of consolation was chiefly efficacious. A young widow was dying in despair because she was leaving four little children behind her, utterly without protec-

tion. The servant of God heard of her anguish and hastened to her bedside. When he left her, she was not only resigned but happy at the thought of confiding her children to the sole care of God. A man of the world came to Ars distracted with rebellious grief at the death of a beloved wife. M. Vianney took him to his heart, comforted him, and sent him away resigned and full of courage.

And yet this soul that was a fountain of heavenly sweetness, abundantly replenished, and ever ready to overflow on others, was steeped in that vinegar and gall that Jesus tasted on the Cross. The Curé of Ars suffered from interior desolation to a degree and for a length of time seldom exceeded in the records of the lives of the saints. He saw his sins like a great black mountain between himself and God; he believed that it was only a miracle of divine mercy that had kept him so long out of hell, and that he was liable at any moment to commit some heinous sin which would exhaust the patience of God, and draw down upon him the eternal punishment that has so long been warded off.

The trial was, no doubt, a special grace from Heaven in order to guard his humility

from the least taint of presumption, to keep him blind to the cause of those supernatural favors which drew the nations to his feet. While the whole world was running after him as a saint, M. Vianney was tortured by the conviction that he was a vile hypocrite; that, owing to his sins, he was the sport of the devil, who was permitted to make use of him to deceive souls and dishonor the priesthood. What he suffered from this delusion, from the agonies of remorse with which it filled him, is not to be described. He frequently said to his confessor that if the mercy of God did not hide from him in some measure the hideousness of his soul and the multitude of his sins, he must die of despair; as it was, he only kept up his courage by cowering before the tabernacle "like a dog at the feet of his master." He was oppressed with a burden of weariness, anguish and disgust that was almost intolerable. He saw himself as a stumbling-block in the way of every one around him; his soul was a prey to fear and remorse; he was in constant terror of falling into some grievous sin that would separate him forever from the love and enjoyment of God; he felt himself every day he lived more unworthy of his sublime



vocation, more unfit to celebrate the divine mysteries.

When the subject of the priesthood was mentioned before him, he would sometimes speak out from the abundance of his heart what he felt about it. One day a fervent and talented young priest remarked that there were many excellent men amongst the clergy. "What do you say, my friend?" exclaimed M. Vianney. "Good men amongst us! Yes, assuredly there are. *But one ought to be a seraph to say Mass!* Ah, if we knew what Mass is we should die of it! We shall only know it in heaven. My child, the cause of all our misfortunes, of every falling off amongst priests, is that we don't think enough about saying Mass." (Here his tears flowed unrestrainedly.) "Oh, when I think that God has deigned to entrust such a privilege to wretches like us! What does the harm is all this worldly news, those conversations, those politics, those newspapers. Priests get their heads filled with them, and then go to their Mass, to their breviary."

He used to say to his Bishop: "If you want to convert your diocese make all your parish priests saints." He felt at times so overpowered by the responsibility of the priest-

hood that he was tempted to run away and hide himself. "Oh, what an awful thing it is to be a priest!" he exclaimed to a young ecclesiastic. "Confession, Sacraments, Mass,—what a load to carry! If men realized what it is to be a priest they would fly to the desert, like the saints, to escape it."

This longing for the desert, for peace—that solitary but supreme happiness that is attainable on earth,—increased with his years. He once said to a dear friend: "I am withering away with weariness. My soul is sorrowful unto death. I have not a moment for communing quietly with God. I can bear it no longer! Tell me, do you think it would be a great sin if I were to disobey the Bishop, and go secretly away?" — "If you were to yield to that temptation," was the reply, "you would lose all the merit of your lifetime." This answer dispelled the temptation for the moment—but only for the moment; it continued to assault him to the end of his days. Nor can we wonder at this when we reflect on what he suffered from his daily imprisonment in the confessional alone. The atmosphere that his soul breathed in that chamber of torture to every priest, was a

prolonged anguish capable of driving mad any one but a saint. He whose soul was so angelically pure was steeped mentally in an atmosphere of sin, for eighteen, sometimes twenty, hours in the day; he had to listen to avowals of outrages against the purity, the love, the holy justice of God, from souls whose imperfect sorrow prevented them from even suspecting the torture they were inflicting upon him. The physical distress that he endured from the bad air of the confessional, its cramping space, from the heat and the cold, was nothing, absolutely nothing, compared to the suffering his soul had to endure through these long sittings.

One day, at his instruction on the catechism, he was led to speak of the priest's mission in the confessional. Suddenly, as if carried away by his feelings, he exclaimed: "Ah, there is no one in the world so wretched as a priest! He spends his life hearing of offences against God, of outrages against His holy name, His Commandments. He is like Peter in the Pretorium: he has always before his eyes Our Lord insulted, despised, mocked, covered with opprobrium. Some are spitting in His face, others are striking Him; others

are pressing the crown of thorns upon His dear head. They push Him rudely; they knock Him down; they kick Him; they crucify Him; they pierce His Sacred Heart. Ah, if I had known what it is to be a priest, instead of going to the seminary I should have run away to La Trappe!"

The Curé generally suffered more from desolation and spiritual anguish on Friday than on other days. On other days he was able to control the appearance of it, but on Friday and on the eve of the great feasts the sufferings of his soul were visible in his countenance. The crowd of pilgrims and penitents that lay in wait to speak to him as he passed from the church to the presbytery after his catechism, used to notice how changed his face was on Friday, as if he were overpowered with bodily pain and mental anxiety. He took refuge in increased prayer from this recurring martyrdom, and performed more rigorous austerities while it lasted. But it never in the slightest degree marred his sweetness, or interfered with the clearness of his mind or the quickness of his judgment.



## XVI.

## THE CURÉ AS A COUNSELLOR.

No incident of this day was more calculated to illustrate this than the open-air audience he gave in the courtyard at noon, when questions on every imaginable subject were showered upon him as he passed through the crowd. An eye-witness one day wrote down a certain number of these questions as he caught them, uttered almost simultaneously by the eager multitude. They fill a couple of printed pages. Here are a few of them: "Father, my son is threatened with blindness; ought I to risk an operation for him?"—"My husband is ill; will he be converted?"—"Father, I am failing in health; ought I take a partner into my business?"—"Must I send away my servant?"—"Ought I sell my land just now?"—"Which is the best college to send my son to?"—"Ought I put my son on the railway or in trade?"—"I have had a proposal of marriage for my daughter; ought I to accept it?"—"My son wants to marry a young girl who has no money; what must I do about it?"—

"Father, what is the truth about Louis XVII?"

"Ought we to believe in La Salette?"—and so on.

It was not unusual for women to ask the Curé's opinion, *en passant*, as to the way they should attire themselves—whether they ought to wear a crinoline or not. His delicate sense of humor was sometimes tickled by these queries, and his answers were none the less wise and to the point for having a touch of irony in them. A lady cried out to him one day: "Father, is my husband in Purgatory?" The holy man looked at her with a twinkle in his blue eyes, and replied: "I have not been there to see." Another exclaimed as he passed her: "Oh, M. le Curé, I am mortally afraid of hell!"—"Then you are the less likely to go there, my daughter." When an importunate pilgrim assured him in a rather indignant tone that she had come two hundred leagues to see him, he answered with an amused smile: "It was not worth while coming so far to see so little, Madame." A young girl, full of her own importance, begged him to examine and decide her vocation. "Your vocation is to save your soul and go to heaven," he replied, and passed on.

But these were exceptional incidents. As a rule, all who came for advice and direction approached the servant of God with discretion, and were met with generous sympathy and inspired counsel. A learned prelate who spent several days at Ars, watching the Curé incessantly, said that nothing in his life and conduct impressed him so much as the unerring judgment and presence of mind with which he decided the cases submitted to him all day long, both in the confessional and out of it. He answered every question as if he had been studying the circumstances, and had weighed the consequences on all sides; speaking briefly, promptly, and in a tone of authority that inspired absolute confidence. You felt that he drew his inspiration from God and the Holy Spirit direct, and that, as Monseigneur Devie said, "if he is not learned he is enlightened."

The Curé of Ars felt keenly, nevertheless, the responsibility that he incurred in thus deciding the doubts and difficulties of souls; and this was, no doubt, one of the many burdens that weighed him down, sometimes making the desire to escape into solitude almost irresistible. He was often heard to say that it

was harder for a parish priest to become a saint than for a Christian in any other state of life. When Monseigneur Dupanloup, in answer to his lamentations concerning the difficulty he had in saving his soul at Ars, remarked that a bishop had heavier responsibilities than a parish priest, the holy man retorted: "Yet there are a great many more bishops in the Martyrology than curés; there are very few curés amongst the saints. It is I who ought to tremble!" And he shook his head with a gesture of despair.

Once again, not long before his death, this awful sense of responsibility, together with his longing for closer union with God in solitude, induced him to attempt a flight. He confided his project to Catherine Lassagne, and made everything ready to steal away in the nighttime; but God wished him to remain the victim of active charity for innumerable souls that still needed him. He was suspected of harboring some such design, and watched; and as he stole from his room with a lighted candle, spies from the house opposite came down into the street, and called out the penitents who were waiting in the church, and so a crowd was quickly collected round the



baffled fugitive. One of the spectators asked him in a severe tone if he was not afraid of committing a grievous sin by abandoning his charge and disobeying his superior. The Curé made no reply, but, like a frightened child, looked timidly at the speaker. The people, following up their advantage, clamored out: "And will you go away without hearing us, who have come such a long way to make our confession to you?" The servant of God still remained silent, but he looked toward the church, as if expecting to see some sign there; and the crowd, pressing him on all sides, moved on to the open door, almost carrying him into the church. He made no resistance, but went straight up to the altar and prostrated himself before the tabernacle, and wept bitterly for a long time; then he rose and walked into the confessional, as if nothing had happened. This was his last attempt to fly from Ars.

## XVII.

## VISITORS TO ARS.

It is probable that one of his reasons for wishing to leave the place was the extraordinary reputation for sanctity that he enjoyed there, and the manifestation of love and reverence of which he was constantly the object. His humility led him to attribute this partly to the naïve credulity of the population, and to his own hypocrisy; but, explain the fact as he would, he suffered from it, and it seemed to him that the delusion was a local one,—that it would vanish if he could but get away from Ars. He saw, nevertheless, that amongst the crowd which thronged the village church night and day there were strangers from almost every land under the sun; numbers of them were men known to the whole world, and whose estimate of him could not by any artifice of humility be set down to the simplicity of ignorance or over-credulous faith. A learned historian—more learned in profane than sacred lore—on witnessing this concourse of men of many races at Ars, exclaimed: “The like has

never been seen since Bethlehem!" Certainly the spectacle was rare enough to remind a thoughtless world of those ages of faith when thousands left their homes and journeyed over land and water to witness a Bernard or a Dominic, in order to kindle their souls at the flame of those wonder-working apostles of Christ Crucified.

Amongst the notable men who during thirty odd years made the pilgrimage to Ars, there was, perhaps, not one whose visit so surprised and delighted M. Vianney as that of Père Lacordaire. When the white habit of the celebrated Dominican was seen in the village, the people pointed after him, remarking, "The great preacher has come to see our Curé!" And when they beheld him amidst the crowd listening with rapt attention to M. Vianney's catechism, their pleasure was equal to their admiration. It was, indeed, a touching thing to see Genius sitting thus humbly at the feet of Sanctity,—to see the orator whose eloquence enthralled the greatest intellects of the age, hanging with devout reverence on the almost inarticulate words of the lowly, illiterate parish priest. M. Vianney himself could hardly believe it, and exclaimed in amazement: "All that is

greatest in learning came in the person of Père Lacordaire to bow down before all that is lowest in ignorance! The two extremes have met."

Père Lacordaire, on his side, was profoundly moved by the fervor and holiness that breathed in every word and gesture and look of the servant of God. The simple discourse seemed to him the word of inspiration, and it was with reluctance that he consented to address the congregation from the same pulpit. But in this the Curé was not to be denied; with a radiant countenance and a gentle touch of humor he announced to his flock: "At Vespers somebody will speak who speaks rather better than I!" Père Lacordaire kept the promise; but he asked pardon for it; assuring the congregation that he had only consented to address them out of respect to the wish of their beloved pastor, whose teaching was so much better than his. "I came here to listen," he said, "not to speak; I came to seek counsel and to be edified." Nothing that he said went to the hearts of the people so much as these words. "Did you hear how the great preacher put himself under the feet of our Curé?" they remarked after the short sermon.



Père Lacordaire was never, perhaps, more eloquent than in that village pulpit. The presence of the humble priest, whom he looked upon as a singularly favored servant of God, inspired him with accents of the most penetrating unction. The Curé was charmed to enthusiasm, and shed tears as he listened to the brilliant diction and elevated sentiments of the orator, whose genius enchanted him. "How can I ever dare to enter my pulpit after this!" he exclaimed, when Père Lacordaire met him. "I feel like that prince who made the Pope ride on his horse, and never dared get upon him afterward himself."

When the two servants of God were saying farewell, there was a struggle as to who should bless the other, and at last they compromised it by each kneeling in turn to receive the blessing of the other. The Curé of Ars stood on the road looking after his guest until the white habit was out of sight. Then he turned back, and with tears glistening in his eyes murmured: "It has been a happy day!" The saintly Dominican, on his side, carried away a deep and lasting impression of the virtues of the Curé of Ars, and always spoke of him as "a saint."

The venerable and learned Dr. Ullathorne, one of the great lights of the Church in England, said to the present writer: "The Curé of Ars gave me a greater impression of sanctity than any man I ever met." The Abbé Comballot was seen sobbing on his knees in the church after he had spoken with the holy priest; and when a friend approached him anxiously, and inquired the cause of his grief, he exclaimed: "I weep to think that I should have grown gray before coming to see this wonderful man. He is a saint! he is a saint!" The holiest priests and religious all felt alike on coming into communication with the great servant of God. He alone was unconscious of anything that entitled him to esteem or admiration. He would sometimes laugh in his gentle way when proofs of the world's opinion were thrust upon him. "These good people are silly," he would say. Sometimes he fancied honestly that they must be mad.

## XVIII.

## RELIC-HUNTERS.

A MARK of veneration that was particularly disagreeable to the Curé of Ars was the desire to possess relics of him, which led people to cut off bits of his clothes. He used, on leaving the confessional, to take off his surplice and throw it on the low wall of the cemetery as he passed into the presbytery; but the people took to cutting it so freely that it had to be constantly renewed, and he was at last obliged to keep it on him in order to preserve it. It was the same thing with his hat: they clipped it till it was not fit to be seen; and as he could not keep renewing it, he soon gave up wearing a hat altogether. Pilgrims, chiefly women, were generally provided with a pair of scissors to operate on his *soutane* when they got a chance. They actually pushed their audacity so far as to cut off bits of hair.

Nothing that the holy man possessed or used was sacred to these relic-hunters. They took his little pictures out of his breviary; and when these were all gone they tore out

leaves of the book itself, until at last it became necessary for him to hide it. They rummaged in his house, they purloined his pens, his ink-bottle—everything they could lay their hands on. They pulled the straw out of his poor mattress; when there was nothing left that could be conveniently carried away, they cut and hacked the few pieces of furniture in his poverty-stricken room; so ruthlessly did they practise this unconscionable theft that his table and chair had to be replaced several times.



## XIX.

## PORTRAITS OF THE CURÉ.

ANOTHER trial that his humility had to contend with was the frequent attempts that were made to steal his likeness. One photographer after another tried to catch it; but the holy man seemed to know instinctively what they were at, and always contrived to baffle them. One artist drew the likeness from memory, but not very successfully. At last M. Cabuchet, a painter of considerable talent and a devout Christian, came to Ars, resolved to paint the Curé's portrait in spite of him. He seated himself in front of the railings during the catechism instruction, and worked away, concealed, as he imagined, by the persons in front of him; but about the third morning, to his surprise and discomfiture, the Curé stooped forward in the middle of his discourse, and said: "Come now, my friend, you have been giving us all distractions long enough. That will do!" M. Cabuchet disappeared for some days, and then returned to the attack, thinking the Curé, who had never seen him except on

this occasion, would have forgotten his face. But here again he was disappointed. M. Vianney at once spied him at work, and asked him humorously if he had nothing to do at home. "M. le Curé," replied the artist, "one would think you want to put me to the door."—"I have a mind to excommunicate you!" retorted the Curé.—"But what have I done? Have I committed a crime?"—"You know well enough what you have done. You have been giving me distractions all the morning."

Fortunately, M. Cabuchet proved a match for the saint in obstinacy, and succeeded in capturing a likeness which conveys a faithful, though of course inadequate, idea of his countenance. The angelic expression of the limpid blue eyes, with their glance alternately tender and piercing, compassionate and severe,—one moment veiled by tears, the next giving out sparks of fire; the smile full of humor and innocent happiness, all this was beyond the reach of art; but the delicate outline of the features with their strange resemblance to Voltaire's, the nimbus of flowing white hair, the pose of the head drooping slightly on the breast from constant habit of adoration,—all these have been transmitted to us. Those

who knew the Curé of Ars say that his eyes were unlike any others they ever beheld; they describe their expression as so luminous and intense, so full of fire when he spoke of the love of God, that the word "supernatural" came instinctively to your mind. In looking at an impenitent sinner, they struck terror into his conscience; but marvellous to say, they never *frightened* any one. There was a majesty, a light of divine peace on his brow that shone visibly, and his smile was so beautiful that it often melted the most indifferent to tears.

M. Vianney's portrait was reproduced in a variety of forms, and in course of time was exhibited in the shop windows for the moderate consideration of two cents. This price set upon his features amused the Curé highly. He would say to strangers: "You see, my caricature is to be had for two cents. These good people know my real value."

## XX.

## HIS WILL.

A MORE startling proof of the real value that was set upon him came to the holy man from Dardilly, his native village. The inhabitants had never ceased to regret his refusal to remain amongst them; and when he had reached the appointed age of three score and ten, it occurred to them to try to secure at least the privilege of having him laid to rest in their midst; so they wrote and begged him to make his will to this effect. The gentle soul was astonished that any one should care what became of his poor body, but he at once complied with the request. Unluckily for Dardilly, however, Ars heard of it, and rose in arms to protest. The Bishop joined with the parish, and implored the Curé not to leave after death the flock he had served so long in life.

His amazement at "all this rumpus about a miserable old carcass" was beyond words; but the wish of his superior was, of course, law to him, and he immediately made a new will. Dardilly, however, resolved to dispute



this. It collected a fund to defray the expenses of an action against Ars for "undue influence," and sent a deputation of notabilities to Lyons to defend what it called its "rights." But this generous warlike attitude had no other result than to show what the estimate of the world was as to the sanctity of the Curé of Ars. He himself seems to have been wholly astonished at the affair, and to have rather enjoyed the touch of grim humor that was mingled with the reverence and the love displayed in this stand-up fight for his body.

## XXI.

## HIS KINDNESS AND PURITY.

BUT the world did not simply hold him in reverence as "a saint": it loved him as a man. He was, in truth, the most lovable of human beings. His simple, human kindness drew all hearts to him. It was the kindness of a heart naturally tender and loving, and made still more so by the love of God. Those who lived with him used to say to one another that M. Vianney had on earth the same heart that he would some day have in heaven, so large was it, so indulgent, so divinely compassionate for every form of suffering. Severe even to inhumanity toward himself, the Curé was as careful as a mother of every one around him.

He was constantly on the watch to spare his missionaries fatigue; he would take pains to guard them from a disappointment or an annoyance, as if they were little children who claimed his utmost indulgence; he treated his own poor body as he would not have treated a vicious beast, but he was frightened to see

the health of his missionaries exposed to the least danger. Having heard one of them coughing at night prayers, when the devotions were over he hurried off bareheaded to the Father's house, under a drenching rain, to tell him to rest in the morning. "I will take the little catechism class in your place," he said; "you are coughing, and it will fatigue you to give the instruction." He used to come out of the confessional and ascend the pulpit to preach in place of a priest who had a cough; and when the latter vehemently protested against this "usurpation," the Curé laughingly replied: "Then I will pray St. Philomena to give me your sore throat!" Having noticed one day that a Father had no warm cloak at the beginning of winter, he had one made for him in secret. He saw another going home in the wet without an umbrella, and the next day a good strong one appeared mysteriously in the Father's room; the Curé had sent into the neighboring town for it. He was always playing these tricks on his fellow-laborers. He practised the natural virtues as diligently, almost, as the supernatural.

Amongst the latter there was perhaps none

that shone with a more heavenly light than his purity. It was more than supernatural: it was angelic. He who lived among sinners,—whose mind was perpetually filled with images of vice held up before it by souls who came to him with their burden of shame and guilt,—he who lived in an atmosphere of vice, was so pure that the very name of impurity made him shudder like the touch of fire. The secret, he always said, for keeping this angelic virtue untarnished was constant mortification, unmerciful cruelty to the body, fasting, cold, watchings—everything that nature abhors and the flesh shrinks from. Those who heard him speak from the altar or in the pulpit on the sin which our Saviour specially expiated in His scourging, declared that it was awful to see him, so completely did he appear to participate in the horror with which the vile sin inspired the suffering Redeemer, and in the pain it inflicted on His bleeding and quivering form at the pillar. It was as if an angel who had been present at the mystery of the Flagellation were trying to make men understand the loathsomeness and the wickedness of the sin that had made that martyrdom of the God-man necessary.



His beautifully expressive countenance would portray in every feature the emotions of his soul. He whose exceeding purity enabled him to see more clearly than others the unbearable purity of the Most Holy, saw also with the illuminated eye of faith the blackness of the sin that defiles the soul like leprosy, and his language in describing it cut into the consciences of his hearers like a sword. He found the most striking images to illustrate it, and he intensified their effect by his gestures, his enunciation: the tears would stream from his eyes, as, clasping and wringing his hands, he lifted his face toward the crucifix and cried out in broken sentences for mercy on sinners: "Ah, Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Blessed crucified One, torn and bruised and streaming with blood, pity the poor creatures that are a prey to this devouring fire! pour out that Precious Blood on them, and quench those flames of hell! . . . Ah, my children, if you knew what you are doing when you sin! If you could see what you are doing to Jesus, what pleasure you are giving the devils, what unspeakable torment you are preparing for yourselves for all eternity! . . . Ah, divine Purity! if men did only know Thee!"

But nothing can give any idea of what the spoken words were. "I often wrote down his instructions," said one who habitually assisted at them, "but when I read them afterward it was no longer the same; the words seemed to have frozen as they came from my pencil. From his lips they were like fire."

## XXII.

## HIS AUSTERITIES.

THE Curé of Ars used to say all his life that the mortifications most efficacious for preserving the virtue of purity and obtaining the gift of prayer were fasting and watching. He carried these so far himself that it was a miracle how he lived. The poverty of his life amounted to destitution. For years he never had a fire lighted in his kitchen; Catherine Lassagne cooked his potatoes for him once a week. Those who were permitted to see his room said that you felt as if you were entering a sanctuary. It was in truth a sanctuary of every evangelical virtue, of prayer and poverty. The mere aspect of it often converted souls. The notary who, after M. Vianney's death, was sent to take an inventory of the furniture in the presbytery, wrote to a friend: "I shall always remember that poor room, where we had the happiness of standing together one day in October, 1859; I shall often recall that poor bed, which was a stepping-stone to heaven; that little table

with its earthenware bowl, and the piece of bread, scarcely touched, that served for the last meal of the holy man...."

The Curé of Ars, who usually designated his body as "my carcass," used toward the end of his life speak of it as "the corpse"; he treated it, in truth, as if it were already dead. He suffered for years from internal pains that were frequently agonizing, but he paid no attention to them; he drove on the corpse without the least compunction. He was a martyr to rheumatism; in his last years it crippled him, and sometimes made the effort of walking, rising, moving his limbs in any way, almost impossible; but this never propitiated him to the poor corpse. "Adam is always well enough!" he would answer jocosely when they urged him to have recourse to certain remedies. He maintained that mortification cost him nothing; that it was "only a habit," and one so full of sweetness and balm that you could not do without it once you had begun to practise it. He had all his life denied himself every innocent indulgence—such as smelling a flower, driving away the flies, drinking when he was thirsty, leaning against a chair when he was on his knees, etc.,—

and he continued this self-denial to the end of his life.

He suffered intensely from cold, but he never allowed himself the smallest relief under it. During the last severe winter of his life, one of the missionary Fathers, who knew that he suffered a little martyrdom from cold feet, surreptitiously introduced into the confessional a hot-water pan. It was placed under a sliding board, and the trick succeeded to perfection; the dear old Curé used to delight his wily friends by exclaiming with emotion, "How good God is! In spite of the intense cold, I have had my feet quite warm this winter. *They have not been frozen once!*"

Old age spared him few of its infirmities; but the more his "corpse" suffered, the brighter his soul seemed to burn. His doctor declared that he had in him the beginning of several organic diseases, some of which had developed, and were making him suffer terribly as time went on. For years those who saw him near were witnesses of the truth of this, though he did his utmost to hide it. "We have seen him again and again," declares one of them, "arrested in the middle of a conversation that he was carrying on with charming gayety; after



a violent effort at self-control, he would grow livid in the face, and tremble, and at last sink into a chair, doubled down with pain. In answer to our eager inquiries he would smile sweetly, and when he regained power to speak say, 'Yes, I am suffering a little,' and go on with the conversation as if it had not been interrupted." A holy priest who enjoyed his confidence asked him once if he had not offered himself up as a victim for his flock. "Perhaps," replied the Curé, "I did say to God some years ago: 'Grant me the conversion of my parish, and I consent to suffer whatever You like to the end of my life.'" He was heard one day exclaiming, "I would gladly consent to suffer the most excruciating pains for a hundred years if God would deign to grant me the conversion of my parish!"

It would seem as if God had accepted the generous offer, for His servant suffered almost unintermittent agonies of one sort or another. Heat affected him as severely as cold, and only God knew what this trial alone must have been to him during those long hours in the confessional, through the sultry heat of summer, when even those waiting in the open church were compelled to push their way out

of the stifling atmosphere to get a breath of air; but the Curé of Ars never allowed himself this momentary relief. When the hour for his escape came he would stagger out of the church, gasping, his limbs hardly supporting him till he reached his room. Here he would fall on the bed, quivering and panting like a hunted creature, too sick to swallow any food; and there he would lie until it was time to return to the confessional.

Sometimes in this interval of release he made four or five vain efforts to get up; yet, though he was too weak to stand, when the time came to return to the church the brave spirit invariably conquered the fainting body, and down he went, often stumbling and falling on the staircase, but never turning back; and grace, that perpetual worker of miracles, always triumphed over nature, and carried him to the end of his day's work—his day's martyrdom. The natural elasticity of his temperament was, as the village doctor said, extraordinary. When he was run down to the last stage of weakness, he would rally his nervous power to the rescue, and lift up his prostrate strength by sheer force of will, in a manner that seemed miraculous.

The Curé of Ars never relaxed his austerities out of condescension for his failing health and exhausted body. When the poor "corpse" was so spent that he had to lean against something to prevent its falling, he would lash at it with sharp iron disciplines till the wall and the floor were spattered with blood. He wore a coarse hair-shirt habitually, and to this comparatively comfortable penance he frequently added a steel chain, or a coarse knotted rope fastened round his waist with a rough iron clasp. Catherine Lassagne attested having found hid away in the bottom of a cupboard in his room four iron disciplines, the end of each chain being armed with sharp steel points or heavy knobs of lead. And these instruments of torture were actually polished by use; some of them were "as bright as silver," other witnesses declared.

11 Catherine Lassagne, in her simplicity, ventured on one occasion to remonstrate with the servant of God for being so pitiless to the little flesh his perpetual fasting had left on his body. The answer was characteristic of his own simplicity. "I am obliged," he said, "to give myself just two or three touches of a discipline in the morning to make the corpse

go. That quickens the fibres. Have you never seen bear-leaders? You know how they tame those vicious beasts—by giving them hard blows with a stick. This is how one masters the body and tames the old Adam.”

The “two or three touches” meant long and steady flagellation. This was attested by persons who occasionally had been permitted to spend the night at the presbytery, and who heard the noise of the metal scourge falling on the bleeding shoulders for two hours at a time,—the executioner only paused now and then, apparently from fatigue. One of these unseen witnesses of the nocturnal flagellations, after listening to the blows for two long hours, burst into tears, exclaiming, “Will he never leave off!”

✓ The Curé went one day to the village blacksmith, and ordered a chain to be made after a particular pattern, giving him some explanation concerning its purpose, which put him off the scent, as the man afterward said; but he happened to show the chain to some one who at once detected the truth, and said that the size and weight of the instrument made him shudder. Toward the end of his life the holy Curé left off using the heaviest disciplines,



probably because his arm no longer had strength to wield them. But he continued to the last to use lighter ones, and to wear a chain or knotted rope under his hair-shirt. What he never relaxed in the slightest degree was his practice of inward mortification, and of those external ones that were presented to him by others. The reputation of his sanctity, which grew every year, kept multiplying the demands made upon him, and increasing the impatience of the crowds, who, seeing how frail he was, were more eager to speak with him, lest by waiting they should miss the chance.

Feeble as he was, the Curé of Ars contrived to satisfy everybody, and no murmuring word, no passing look of impatient weariness, ever ruffled the serenity of his countenance and manner. He was often heard to say that he had naturally a hot temper, and that it needed constant vigilance and self-restraint to keep himself in order. If this were in any degree true, he must have begun the fight and won the victory very early indeed; for no one had ever observed a trace of violence in him even in his childhood. The inconsiderate eagerness of the pilgrims who thronged the church afforded him a daily exercise of patience



for they would push him so rudely in their desire to touch his *soutane*, or even catch his eye, that he was frequently in danger of falling, and sometimes must have been thrown down had not his curate protected and supported him.

## XXIII.

## HIS END.

BUT the end was approaching. The night was drawing near, which was to be followed by the dawn of that blessed day toward which the faithful servant had been journeying for seventy-three long years. His people saw that he was failing; they saw the summons in the increased weakness of the frail figure, that was now bent and trembling; they heard it in the feebleness of the beloved voice, that had grown almost inaudible; they heard it in the cough that hacked him incessantly. But he himself was permitted to see more clearly than any one that the day of rest was approaching. In the summer of 1858 he wrote a letter (still extant) in which he said that he had only another year to live.

In the month of May, 1859, he invited his parishioners to come and hear a sermon on a particular evening. They answered the call, as usual, with alacrity, and crowded the church to overflowing. The pastor addressed them in accents of extraordinary fervor and solemnity;

he implored them to be contrite for their sins, to love God, and to forgive all who had wronged them. Then he said: "When Moses felt that he was about to die, he called his people together, reminded them of the numberless mercies that God had showered on them, exhorted them to be faithful and grateful, and showed them the Promised Land. Permit me to do likewise, my brethren; and let me remind you of how good our divine Saviour has been to you. . . ." He went on to recapitulate the many spiritual advantages that had been granted to the village—such as the presence of the Sisters of Charity, the Christian Brothers, the Missionaries, etc.,—and he besought them to make good use of these opportunities for themselves and their children. He then thanked them all for the generosity they had displayed in subscribing toward a fund for building a church in honor of his dear St. Philomena. "O my children, you have done a beautiful thing in this!" he cried out with emotion; "but, indeed, whenever I have gone to you for help, you have never refused me—never! . . ."

These tender and touching thanks were his last public pastoral utterance; they were the *Nunc dimittis* of the old priest in the temple

where he had grown gray waiting for his Lord. His people were greatly affected, but they did not understand the message of benediction and farewell the words were meant to convey. They had seen their pastor so feeble, so suffering for the last twenty years, that they had come to think he would go on forever as he was, sustained miraculously under a burden of work which divided amongst ten priests would have still been heavy. "Monsieur le Curé was not like other men: he was a living miracle." There was no reason why death should ever prevail over those frail limbs, over that shadow of a body whose vitality was all superhuman; why it should ever silence that feeble voice which had so long been the medium of grace and mercy to men; why it should quench those eyes that shone like stars in the emaciated face, reflecting the glance of Jesus in their sweetness, their purity, and their divine compassion for sinners.

Nevertheless, the Curé of Ars was to die. The heat of the month of July in the year 1859, was tropical, and the servant of God was more overpowered by it than he had ever been before. The crowds that knelt round his confessional were so distressed by the sultry

atmosphere of the church that they could hardly bear it; it suffocated them, and they kept escaping continually into the courtyard to breathe. But the Curé never moved; he sat on from soon after midnight till eleven in the morning, and again from one o'clock till eight in the evening. The cough from which he had suffered for five and twenty years was now almost incessant; the want of air irritated his lungs, and he kept constantly coughing a weak, short cough that sounded like a little sob or gasp, and was exceedingly painful and wearing. When a person who noticed how he suffered from it pitied him, he replied with a smile: "Yes, it is very tiresome; it wastes so much of my time." But when urged to give himself some respite from the terrible strain on his lungs, he replied gently, shaking his head: "We shall rest ourselves in Paradise."

On Friday, the 29th of July, he went through his ordinary routine of duties—sat over seventeen hours in the confessional, gave his instruction on the catechism, said night prayers in the pulpit, made a little exhortation to his flock, and then left the church. But on entering the presbytery he sank upon a chair, and murmured faintly: "I am worn out!" (*Je*



*n'en peux plus.*) Many a time of late years he had been heard to say, half-jestingly: "The sinners will wear out the sinner!" The words had come true: they had worn him out at last.

The Father who had accompanied him from the church now assisted him to his room, saw him throw himself on the bed, and then left him alone. He was anxious and tenderly concerned for the servant of God, but he felt as if he dared not stay beside him; he did not even venture to listen at the door. This one night—this last night before the dying man entered on those four days of agony that preceded his death—was therefore left sacred. God kept it sacred between Himself and His servant; there was to be no witness to their intercourse; no human eye was to penetrate the secret of what passed between the faithful servant and his Master, nor to trespass within that room where angels were assuredly gathered round the penitential couch, which had witnessed so many conflicts with the powers of evil, so many victories of grace over nature.

The Angelus rang at midnight, but the confessor did not come to the confessional. At one o'clock he made an effort to rise and

go down to the church; but in vain; he fell back on his mattress. He had used up his last bit of strength; the poor body, spent with hard work and harder treatment, had come to the end of its powers. The Curé called out in a feeble voice for help. One who was walking close at hand heard him, and hurried in and asked what was the matter. "I think this is my poor end" (*ma pauvre fin*), answered M. Vianney.—"Shall I go for help?"—"No: don't disturb anybody. It is not worth while."

The night wore on just like any other night. The crowd of penitents—those penitents whose unconscious cruelty had done him to death—were waiting below for the confessor. They were told that he could not come, that he was dying. The words spread through the village, and were received first with incredulity, then with despair. "Monsieur le Curé dying! Impossible! There will be a miracle!" But he who had worked so many miracles for his flock was not to perform this one.

When the day broke, and the hour came at which the Curé was in the habit of saying his Mass, he made no attempt to rise; he was in great pain. "You are suffering?" said the curate. The servant of God made a slight

movement with his head full of resigned assent. "We are in hopes St. Philomena will obtain your cure," said one who was present; "we are going to invoke her with all our might, that she may obtain your recovery as she did eighteen years ago."—"O St. Philomena can do nothing now!" was the smiling response. When these words were repeated to the anxious crowd below, it was as if all who heard them had been stricken in their dearest affections. The grief of the people was indescribable.

Oh, when we complain of the little love there is in the world we say what is not true! It is not the will or the power to love that is wanting amongst men; it is the rarity of any subject capable of kindling it. The coldest and worst of us are ready enough to love when we find a fellow-creature worthy of love, and none are so worthy of it as the saints; for they most resemble God, the centre, the source, the beginning and the end of love—Love itself. The world, for all its coldness and sinfulness, is quick to recognize the beauty of holiness, to worship it, to love it. The wicked ones may gaze on it from afar; they may be afraid to draw near lest it should conquer them utterly, and compel them to the only

tribute of love it can accept—imitation; but they can not see it even in the distance without falling under its divine spell. Yes, the saints have been loved in this world as no other class of men have been loved. They, more than all others, have been permitted a foretaste of heaven by realizing here below the truth of that blessed mystery, God is Love.

It would, no doubt, have been a great surprise to the humility of the Curé of Ars if he could have witnessed the overwhelming and universal grief of his flock during those days that he lay dying. It would have touched his tender, affectionate heart to see how they loved him—for their grief was, in truth, the measure of their love; but, above all, it would have gladdened his apostolic heart to see the manifestation of their piety and faith that it drew forth, for they prayed without ceasing, day and night; they made vows to all the saints in heaven; they besieged the blessed souls in purgatory; they sent messengers in haste to distant shrines, to monasteries and convents; they gave alms, and were lavish in promises of alms and penances and pilgrimages. But the miracle was not to be granted: the confessor's crown was ready.

On Tuesday evening M. Vianney asked for



the last Sacraments. It so happened that a great number of priests and religious from distant dioceses were at Ars just then, and their presence gave an additional solemnity to the august rite, at which the entire parish assisted; for the church, the court, the wide square outside the presbytery, were crowded with the people, kneeling in fervent prayer, from the time the bell began to toll, announcing the farewell visit of Jesus to His servant. Just as He entered the room, one who was dear to the dying man came close to him, and with clasped hands implored him to ask Our Lord to spare him yet a while. The Curé turned his luminous eyes on the suppliant, and without uttering a word made him understand that it could not be. Tears trickled slowly down his cheeks as he fixed his gaze on the divine Host and received It into his heart. He said nothing; he uttered no edifying words; he was in death, as he had been through life childlike in his simplicity. L

A deep silence followed. The crowd even outside hushed every sound, lest it should disturb the peace of that holy death-chamber. But they expected a sign from the dying saint. The people had gone on hoping for a



miracle to the last; and when this seemed inexorably denied, they looked at least for some sublime manifestation of holiness which should signalize the departure of their pastor, making his death different from the deaths of other men. Here again they were to be disappointed. The Curé of Ars was to die as simply as "the little child," whom he had resembled all his life. That bare, unfurnished room of his, which had been so long a battle-field between the forces of heaven and hell,—where demons had mocked and threatened and tormented him, where angels had ministered to him, and the Queen of Angels defended and consoled him;—that room where such wonderful scenes had taken place, where so many mysteries had been accomplished,—was now as quiet, as commonplace as the cradle of a child.

A few hours after Extreme Unction and Viaticum had been administered, the Bishop of the diocese, who had been summoned in haste, arrived at Ars, breathless, eager, like a man who has ridden for dear life, and knows not whether he is yet in time. He approached the presbytery praying out loud, and pushed on into the house, scarcely seeming conscious of the kneeling crowd that made way for him.

The moment he entered the room a beautiful smile overspread M. Vianney's face, and he made a gesture as though he would have risen to receive the prelate; but the latter prevented him, and, bending over him, embraced him tenderly and gave him his cross to kiss. When he withdrew it, it was wet with the tears of the dying man. The Bishop remained some time praying and weeping by the bedside of the servant of God, and then went softly out of the room, blessing the crowd in silence as he passed through them.

The hours went slowly by. Within and without, the people continued watching in prayer. Two hours after midnight, Abbé Monnin, seeing that the end was at hand, began the prayers for the departing. As he pronounced the words, "May the saints of God come to meet him, and conduct him into the holy city," Jean-Marie Vianney gently breathed his last, and entered into the presence of his Lord.

Then the silence which had hung like a pall over the village was broken, and the people rent the air with wailing and lamentation. It seemed impossible that it could be true, this irreparable loss that had befallen them!

"*Monsieur le Curé is dead!*" How were they to go on living without him,—without that holy presence that was as the visible shadow of the divine Presence in their midst; without that wise and tender friend, whose sympathy was always open to them like a mother's arms, whose heart was full of compassion for every misery of their souls, whose hand had the healing power to touch every infirmity of their bodies! The Angelus would no longer sound from the little church tower at midnight to let the sinners know that *Monsieur le Curé* was in the confessional. It seemed as if there would be no more grace to be had, now that their saintly pastor had left them.

The pilgrims who had come from distant places to confess to him, to seek his inspired guidance, were above all inconsolable; they had lost an opportunity that could never be recalled; and as they joined in the *De Profundis* that the broken-hearted villagers sobbed out together in the church, they seemed to hear the Angel of Death uttering the hopeless sentence: "Too late, too late! Ye can not enter now!" That confessional, where year after year so many thousands of souls had been cleansed of their leprosy and sent away

whole; where so many miracles of grace had been performed; where the powers of darkness had been beaten by night and by day;—that blessed tribunal of stupendous mercy was empty; the bent, frail figure of the dear old priest would never be seen entering it again. What were the poor sinners to do? How those belated ones regretted not having come sooner. A few days earlier, and they might have received absolution from the “saint”; but now it was too late. Never again would the divine *Ego te absolvo* be pronounced by that feeble voice, whose consoling accents had penetrated into guilty souls like dew from heaven, bidding the penitent sinner to “go in peace.”

The desolation of those present who had “come too late” found an echo in many other souls at a distance, who, on hearing of the death of the Curé of Ars, were stricken with remorse for not having hastened sooner to seek at his hands the miracle of mercy of which they stood in need. But the servant of God, like unto his kind Master, had “compassion on the multitude,” and continued to speak to souls from his grave, to touch sinners to repentance and the sick to healing. Even when dead he yet spoke, and exercised that zeal



which had burned him away, a living holocaust on the altar of divine love. Innumerable and extraordinary spiritual graces were received by the pilgrims at Ars: hardened sinners were suddenly converted; faithful souls were quickened to unwonted fervor, inspired with generous desires of self-sacrifice; a current of faith and ardent piety was felt all through the population.

Jean-Baptiste Vianney had been venerated during his life as a highly favored servant of God, and death now gave a supreme consecration to this universal reverence, and called forth one of those manifestations of faith for which we must go back many centuries to find a parallel. By common consent, without any inter-communication among the priests, the church bells of all the neighboring villages began to toll as soon as the news of his death became known, and all the populations hastened in to Ars. The poor room where the dead pastor lay was very small, and the stair leading to it too narrow to give convenient passage to the crowds who wanted to see him, to touch him with rosaries and medals; so he was carried down to a room on the ground-floor, which was turned into a *chapelle ardente*, and decorated



with such simple pomp as became the presence of the priest whose love of my Lady Poverty had emulated that of Saint Francis. Coarse white sheets were hung on the walls, and flowers and green garlands pinned on them by loving hands, and many candles were lighted. Here for two days and two nights thousands of people kept passing before "the dead saint" (as popular instinct called him), kneeling for his blessing, weeping and praying.

It was a wonderful scene to be enacted in this France of the nineteenth century. From every part of the Empire people of all classes, but chiefly the upper ones, flew as fast as the fastest trains could carry them to gaze once again, or for the first and last time, on the face of an old priest who had served God with perfect love. That and nothing more. Over six thousand strangers came to Ars during those forty-eight hours that the Curé lay there on his last couch. It was a spectacle calculated to make the children of this world reflect, and compare the reward they receive from the world at the end of a life of hard service with that which crowns the fidelity of the children of God. M. Vianney had shunned the applause of men as we shun humiliation; he had hid

away his good works and his supernatural graces as the wicked hide their crimes; and yet here he was, surrounded by such honors as kings and princes can not command, and which a deceitful world never bestows on its most faithful slaves or most brilliant votaries.

The heat was intense, but it seemed powerless to touch the body which penance had sublimated in life to the parity of a spirit. The features did not change, but the smile deepened; the expression of the face grew sweeter, as if it were being gradually transfigured.

On Saturday at break of day a vast number of priests and religious began to arrive. The village streets were thronged from the earliest hour. A great silence brooded over the summer morning. When the time came for forming the procession, the crowds fell back, making way for the many who were entitled to precedence,—everyone accepting with unquestioning docility the programme hurriedly improvised with a view to orderly decorum.

But the moment the coffin appeared lines and precedence were swept away, and there followed an explosion of grief that nothing could control. Ranks and regulations were

broken through, the people with a sudden movement surging forward as if to embrace the coffin, while a sound between a sob and a loud cry rose from every heart. There was not the smallest confusion or disorder, but all external array—the symmetry of the procession—was at an end, swamped in the great wave of emotion that overflowed from the sorrowing multitude.

The Bishop of Lyons pronounced the funeral oration and—in order that, as far as possible, it might be heard by all,—he spoke in the open air, on the *place* in front of the church. He took for his text, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” It was a beautiful discourse; but its eloquence consisted chiefly in the deep feeling of the orator, and the response that his subject awoke in all his hearers. What could he tell them of the Curé of Ars that they did not know? His life had been a light, a joy and a glory in the Church of God ever since, as a little shepherd boy, he hugged his wooden Madonna, and knelt before it in the deep shade of the woods, and coaxed away his playmates from their games to say the Rosary with him. His love for Mary had grown with his growth, and as an

old priest grown gray in the service of the Altar he retained this apostolic, childlike devotion to her, luring others to her service by the force of his own ardent faith. The austerities of his life, his heroic penance, his humility, his stupendous gift of miracles,—the world had witnessed those things for half a century, in spite of his vigilant efforts to hide them. He was known to be an illiterate man—to have had great difficulty in learning enough Latin to pass his examinations; and he was also known to have been so divinely illuminated that the wisest and the most learned ecclesiastics came to him for advice, and accepted his guidance as that of one inspired.

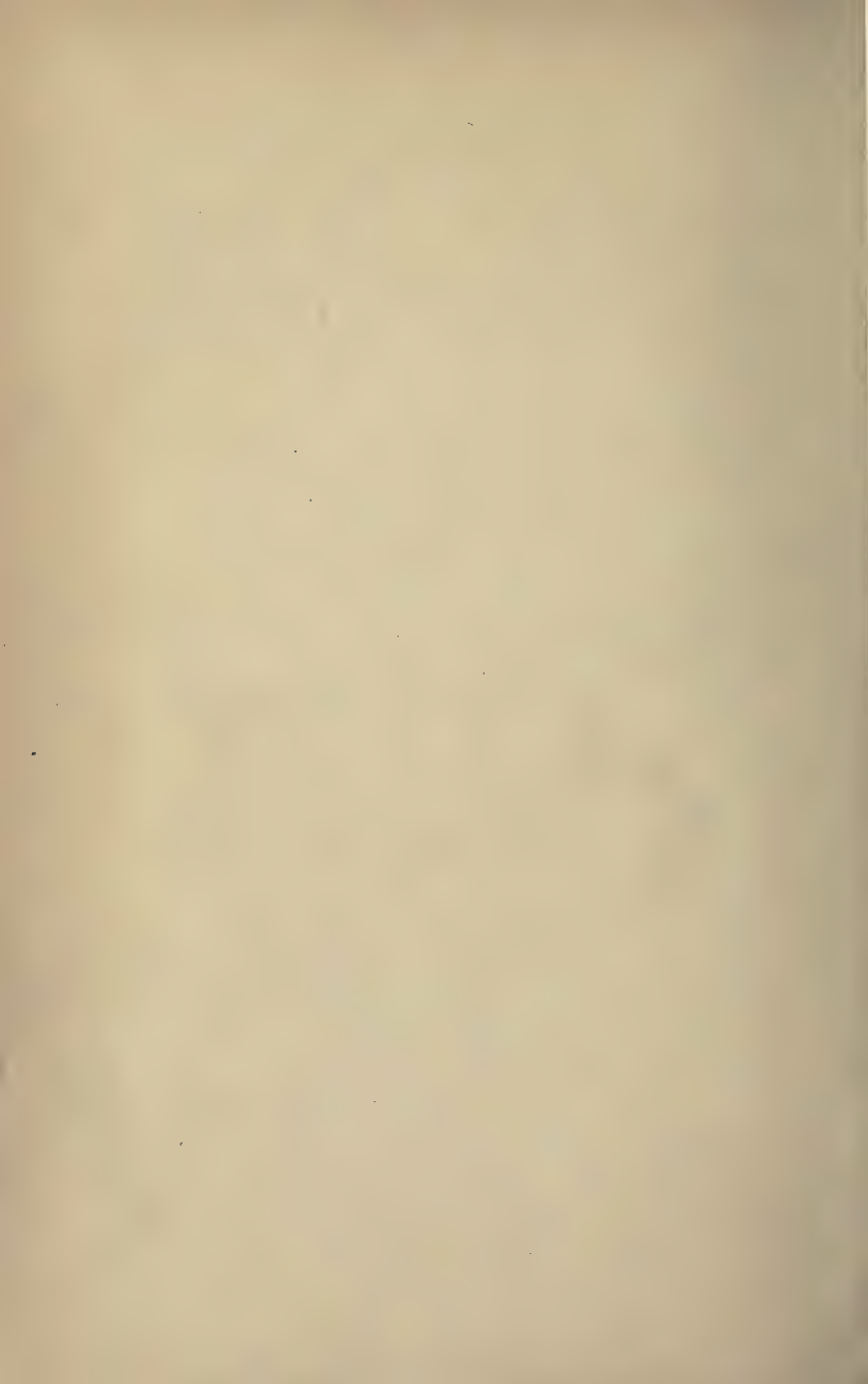
There were few dry eyes present amongst the thousands who were congregated round the coffin while the Bishop of Lyons poured out his sorrow and his consolations to the bereaved flock. He gave the absolution; the body was carried into the church, and placed in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, close to the confessional where the Curé of Ars had won the confessor's crown and, perhaps, the martyr's palm. Then the *Requiem* Mass began. The church was too small to contain a twentieth part of the crowd, but those outside were

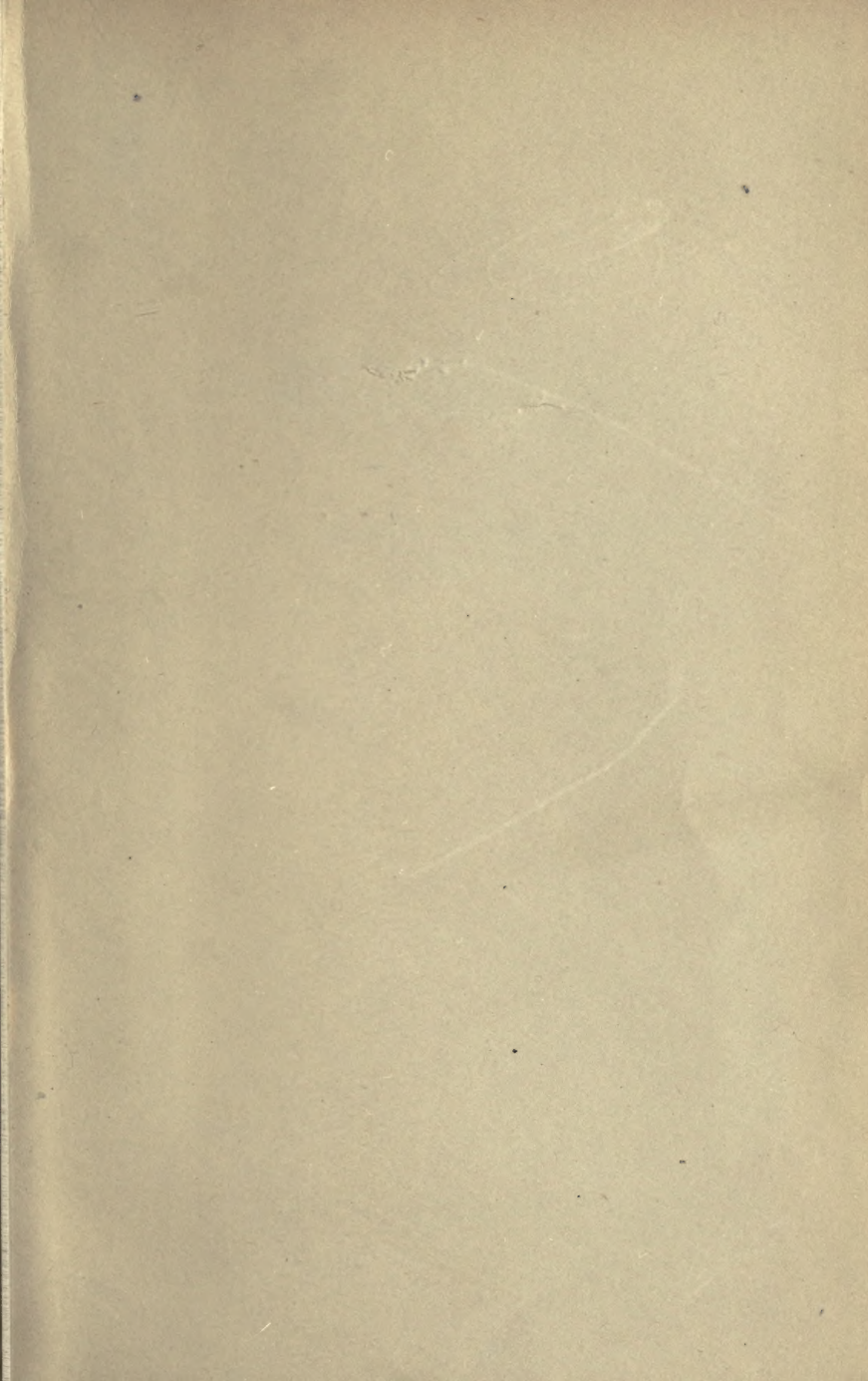
kneeling as reverently as those within. The beauty and solemnity of the scene were things to be felt rather than described. All ranks were confounded, all hearts united in the bond of a common faith and a common grief. Nobles and mechanics, magistrates and peasants, high-born ladies and hard-handed working-women,—all knelt close together in ardent prayer: a grand illustration of the only equality possible here below—the equality commanded by charity, by the true brotherly love which finds its supreme glorification in the consoling mystery of the Communion of Saints.

So they walked through the green village, accompanying to his last resting-place the faithful and beloved servant who had toiled for them to his latest breath, and who was now blessing them from the presence of his Lord and theirs.

O holy, gentle-hearted Curé of Ars, bless us still, and pray for us; that we too may be worthy to receive that joyous welcome, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of thy Lord!"







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